MRS. HERNDON'S INCOME

HELEN CAMPBELL

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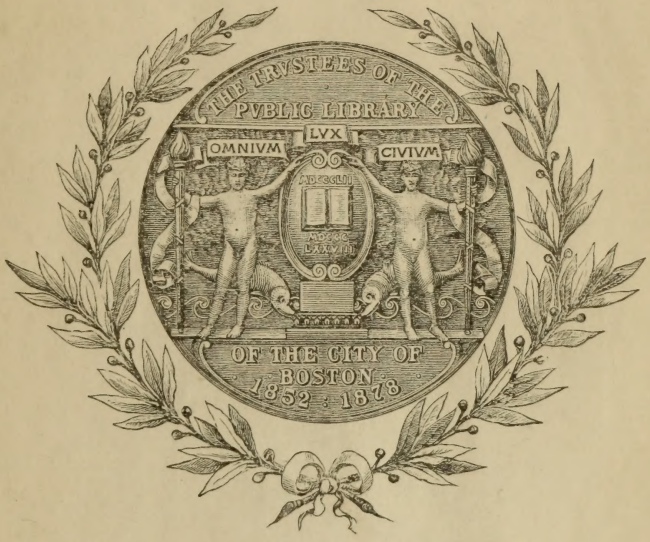

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" The days of the nations bear no trace
Of all the sunshine so far foretold;
The cannon speaks in the teacher's place,
The age is weary with work and gold;
And high hopes wither, and memories wane,
On hearths and altars the fires are dead;
But that brave faith hath not lived in vain,
And this is all that our watcher saith."

MRS. HERNDON'S INCOME.

A Novel.

BY

HELEN CAMPBELL,

AUTHOR OF "THE WHAT-TO-DO CLUB."

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MRS. HERNDON'S INCOME.

I.

WHY Margaret did it, she could not tell then, nor for years afterward. To hear grandmother's measured voice say to Dr. Phelps, "Yes, she is a very good child; she has given me very little trouble since she came to us," and immediately feel that then, that moment, she must break loose, — do something, anything, that would prove her to be a free and independent being. Her little white sunbonnet hung in the passage-way between the old dining-room and the library, grandfather's private room, where he sat now with a pile of papers before him. There always were papers before him; and if Margaret came too near him, as she sometimes did when stealing toward the book-shelves, he said abstractedly, "Not now, child, not now," without lifting his head.

In grandmother's room it was as bad. The stuffed sofa at the foot of the bed, where she always sat in the morning, must be avoided just as carefully as the library table; for Madam Coolidge, as the townspeople called her, sat there rigid and inflexible, her work-basket and knitting, Pollok's "Course of Time" and Thomson's "Seasons," on the round table near it. This was for week days; but on Sunday "Scott's Commentary" took their place, looked upon with deadliest

animosity by Margaret, who read one of its chapters after the early tea, and then was haled away to bed by Randy an hour before the usual time.

Randy was gaunt and lean with never-ending work, and silent as Madam Coolidge herself, but with a soft spot in her dry old heart for this old-fashioned child, who made no complaint and seemed to have no wishes nor fancies of her own. Randy remembered Margaret's mother, who also had been an old-fashioned child, with a gleam, at times, of the Coolidge temper, and who had seemed always to have as little real place in the house as the second Margaret, who had no trace of her young mother save in the clear, dark eyes, with their direct and questioning gaze.

Fixed routine ruled the house. The Squire had married, late in life, nobody knew precisely why, Miss Martha Pulsifer, long the mistress of a small private school, her one pleasure in which had been the constant formulating of new rules and revising of old ones, the code at last reaching such length that it really required a three years' course to keep it. The same passion remained when she became mistress of the old Coolidge mansion; and the child that in time intruded itself in the silent dwelling was regarded chiefly as an interruption. The Squire loved it in dumb, undemonstrative fashion, and might even have roused enough to take active interest in the little life. But a network of rules was woven about it from the beginning, and the one or two occasions on which he took it into his arms were made so wretched, first by fear that he should in some way break or otherwise damage the mysterious production, and last by the deep distrust with which he was viewed by both Madam Coolidge and Randy, that he ceased to make advances, and retreated permanently into the library.

As the baby grew into childhood two points were impressed upon her: one, that her father must never be interrupted; the other, that mother did not like kisses, and was most pleased when she was stillest. Yielding by temperament, there was seldom hint of revolt; and though Randy could have told her certain experiences that gave the clew to what afterward happened, Madam Coolidge had never the slightest thought that her methods were hard or their results unnatural. It was a thunderbolt from a clear sky when the daughter, who had been at Deepmouth for a month or two, at the house of two old cousins with whom the Squire had always kept up some show of intercourse, failed to appear at the time set for her return, but sent instead a quiet little letter in which she announced her marriage to Lieutenant John Wentworth, who, on the eve of a long cruise, had so implored and beset her that she had suddenly yielded. They came in, hand in hand, one morning to the low-ceiled parlor, where Cousin Lucia sat knitting, and stood before her; and the old lady, who loved them both and knew what the girl's life had been, looked only mildly shocked as John said, —

"Parson Adams has just married us, Cousin Lucia; and I want you to take care of my wife when I am gone."

On the whole, when Madam Coolidge thought it over, it was the best way. There had been no disturbance, nor would there be. Margaret stayed on with the old cousins, contented and happy as she had never been, quite unmindful of criticism, and pouring her new joy into long letters to the young husband in whose life she lived.

She had gone home at last for a short stay, reproaching herself in her unbroken happiness for her indifference, and with a vague hope that now, perhaps, things might be different. Life had so changed

that it seemed as if change must be here also; but she found none. The old, inflexible routine was unaltered; and if human will had its way, there was no possibility of break. Margaret hardly heeded it. Absorbed in a coming happiness, she sat for hours each day in the old summer-house, fashioning small garments, and dropping them to look off to the mountain, a sense of rest and peace in its brooding shadows and in every breath of the sweet air; and here the messenger found her. There had been a sudden stir in the house when the Squire came up from the post-office with the letters. Madam Coolidge had looked strangely disturbed, and called for Randy; and Randy had wrung her great hands and looked from the window to the garden.

"I 'll tell her," she said at last; "there ain't anybody else to do it, as I see."

Madam Coolidge nodded, and sat there silent, looking at the Squire as he walked up and down, while Randy went out to the summer-house.

"The dew 's falling," she said. "You 'd better come in, Miss Margaret."

Margaret laughed.

"Dew at five o'clock in a July afternoon, you foolish Randy?"

Then her face changed.

"Something has happened," she said. "It is John. What is it?"

"Come into the house, my lamb," Randy said, bursting into tears. "He 's dead and drowned."

Margaret made no sound. She looked for a moment in Randy's face, then sank slowly down, with a face so like death that the helpless Squire thought it so as he answered Randy's frantic call. They carried her in and laid her on her own bed, but she gave no sign. The night was long; but at daybreak there were two births, — the baby Margaret into the

earth-world; the mother Margaret into that other world nearer than we know, where the hampered, perplexed, struggling life ends and real life begins.

Determined to do her duty thoroughly, it still struck Madam Coolidge as almost an impertinence in Providence to once more thrust upon her the oversight of a child when she had supposed such experience safely ended. But the duty was done, and the baby grew; any mothering that it received coming from Randy, who silently worshipped it. But one effect of the experience remained with Madam Coolidge, — a rooted dislike to the few remaining members of the Wentworth family, and a determination that Margaret should never run such risk as her mother had done. As soon as old enough she should be sent to school. In the mean time no child could have made her less trouble. She obeyed every rule, learned her lessons with an ease and speed that amazed Madam Coolidge, and left her the moment they ended. What she did in the intervals was never questioned. Randy had her in charge, and so long as no disturbance was made there was no occasion for question. Only Randy saw the moments of revolt when Margaret, with stifled cries and sobs, said she hated everything and could n't bear to live any longer; while Randy sat in silence, patting her with her great hand and making no comment when the scene ended. Grandmother never suspected, and grandfather had no time for suspicion or anything else but the constant polishing of verses, which, polish as he might, would never be poems. He recited them now and then, as he walked up and down the library, his hands behind him, his white hair combed straight back, the crimped ruffles of his shirt and his white waistcoat making him look like a dignified and reserved pouter-pigeon. Margaret walked beside him, her fair little head barely reaching his

elbow, and her hands also clasped behind her. She admired her grandfather, considering him as a poet only inferior to Shakspeare, whose acquaintance she had made at six, turning over the leaves of an illustrated edition, and lingering longest at "The Tempest." She read it before she could pronounce the names of any of the characters, and told the story over and over to the patient Randy.

"Some day I 'm going to see them all," she said each day; and Randy nodded in silence.

To-day Shakspeare and every other resource had failed. She had watched in the wood-house chamber, where the butternuts were kept, hoping that, as often happened, a squirrel would creep in from the roof and carry them one by one to some hiding-place under the eaves, stopping now and then to eye the motionless little figure near the trap-door through which she climbed from the ladder below. There were none to be seen. Strawberries were ripe, and no squirrel of any mind at all would eat nuts when berries were to be had. Margaret scrambled down again, and walked slowly around the house, looking down the terrace paths winding to the street below. Chestnuts, oaks, and elms made a mass of foliage through which the sun only flickered here and there. At the north side were two butternut trees and a spreading black-walnut, whose spicy nuts Margaret tucked away in her drawers with the feeling that their perfume held something foreign and unusual that deserved special care.

Ninety years the house had stood there, and in none of them had anything ever been thrown away or destroyed. The row of fire-buckets still hung in the hall, on the paper of which were hosts of little red angels with brown wings, and on the landing was the old clock that had marked the hours for five generations of Coolidges. It was one of the three

things that Margaret dreaded, with a terror that she never told. It was only at moments. The steady tick might go on unnoticed for a week or a month. Then Margaret, lingering on the landing, would find her eyes fixed on the little pane of glass in the door, through which she saw the long pendulum swinging slowly back and forth. What held her eyes she could never tell, but they fastened there till the pendulum seemed to swell and the tick grow loud as the old church bell, and she felt that in one moment more the door would fly open and something happen — who could tell what? Then she cried out and flew to Randy, who received her in her great apron and let her hide her head till the panic was over. It always happened then, that, unless the day were too stormy, Margaret stole out through the garden, with its formal beds of sweet, old-fashioned flowers, past the decaying graperies and the dilapidated summer-house, down the path to the meadow. Here were terraces, too, once the pride of the whole town, but overrun now with matted vines and shrubs, and on the second one grew two great elms, the graceful branches falling in such fashion that they made an oval frame in whose setting one saw the green meadows, the mill-pond and the winding stream that fed it, and, beyond, the mountain with its shifting shadows and its brooding quiet. Margaret needed all the quiet it had to give; for half-way to the meadows was her second terror, — the family tomb, crumbling like everything else, built into the side of the hill and crowned with strange growths found nowhere else. To sit down opposite it on the projecting roots of a hemlock tree that carpeted the space with its spicy needles, and gaze steadily at the door studded with great nails, and having three little heart-shaped openings near the top, had a horrible fascination. Randy had told her all the names of

the dead-and-gone Coolidges; and Margaret, with her eyes fixed on the openings, thought of each one, till at last eyes seemed to answer hers, and whispers come to her, and she fled silently and swiftly back to Randy again. What connection there was between clock and tomb and the old herb-room at the head of the garret stairs she did not know. The garret itself was her delight. She knew every article in it, from the foot-stoves and spinning-wheel to the barrel of old Parson Coolidge's forgotten sermons; but as twilight came on she turned to watch the herb-room door as she watched the other terrors, certain that it held something mysterious and unknown, and stealing past it at last, when she had looked till looking longer was unbearable, with dilated eyes, and hands so cold that Randy, as she rubbed them, shook her head and felt that the child was marked for an early grave. But in spite of this morbidness, born of silence and repression, and the tumult of inward forces she had no voice to describe, the air and sunshine she loved held healing for her, and she lived a double life, both equally unknown to the preoccupied old people.

Before Margaret was nine years old she knew the face and name, and all that Randy could tell her, of every man, woman, and child that entered the decorous old church on the hill. Randy seldom went there. Her place was the white meeting-house on the Common; and as Margaret was allowed now and then to go there with her, she came to feel acquainted with the whole village.

"You had n't ought to be so curious, Margaret," Randy would say, checking herself suddenly in the midst of details as to who Abel Lamson married, or how it happened that Toby Pettis had but one leg.

"I'm not curious; I only like to think about them all. When I get big I shall go and see them,"

Margaret answered, and went on questioning. Why her grandmother never went among them she did not ask. That seclusion was the only thing for a Coolidge she took for granted, but listened to Randy, her clear eyes seeming to draw out everything that had been locked away most securely, while holding assurance as powerful that the trust would never be violated. But she longed to see for herself at last; not only the life about her, but the larger life that waited somewhere, and must be hers, some day — who could tell when?

Margaret turned from the terrace and went into the north parlor, following for a time the fortunes of various ladies and gentlemen who wandered over the landscape paper on the walls, and for each of whom she had a story. Even this palled at last, and she stole into the library, where grandfather paced up and down, murmuring over lines and shaking his head impatiently at defective rhymes. Dr. Phelps's sulky stood at the back gate. Madam Coolidge was a chronic case. Nobody knew precisely what ailed her; but Dr. Phelps came once a week and sat for an hour, giving the news in so decorous a manner that nobody could have dreamed of calling it gossip. The door was open, and Margaret leaned against it and listened, fixing her clear brown eyes on the weather-beaten old man as he talked. What was he saying?

"The Dukes down by the swamp? No business there! Somebody ought to order them off. Hard cases, — a bad lot."

She had read of dukes. They were magnificent people, in Shakspeare chiefly, though grandfather had said that they lived in England now, and in other places too. Was it possible that some of them had come to Edgeton, and were to be seen?

Nobody ever went to the swamp lying at the north of the village, and around which a road wound to

the mountain. Punk Hole was in the middle of it; a deep, well-like space of clear water, which the villagers called bottomless, and over which the will-o'-the-wisps danced at night. Margaret had seen them once, as they drove home from Woodstock late in the evening, and shuddered in silent terror as she looked. Now she listened eagerly, for Dr. Phelps held out a little cluster of fragile flowers, and Madam Coolidge, whose one expressed pleasure was in wild-flowers, called to her to bring the little vase from the stand in the north parlor.

"From the very edge of Punk Hole," the Doctor was saying, as she came back, "and that Dukes child skipped among the hummocks as if she had been born among them. She says there is just one spot where they grow. I have never seen them here before, but always went to Breakneck for them."

Margaret looked at the shadowy little flowers as the Doctor placed them tenderly in the glass. Of course it was natural that a duke's child should be able to find what nobody had ever found before.

"What are they?" she asked timidly.

"Arethusas, child," Dr. Phelps's big voice answered. "'Arethusa arose from her couch of snows.' Did you ever hear of her? She's worth your acquaintance, — the lady of the snows. Your cheeks look too much to-day as if you belonged to her."

Margaret shrank away. Comment on herself before grandmother always distressed her. She leaned against the window, wondering again about this duke, and heard the talk go on till roused again by the words: "Yes, she is a good child; she has never given us any trouble from the beginning."

And then came that sudden, inexplicable flood of desire for something different. She snatched her sun-bonnet, and in a moment stood on the porch of the back kitchen. Oh, to go without it! To be

tanned and freckled and everything else considered most ruinous! She meant to be bad anyway. Why not have the additional flavor of going bareheaded? Discretion prevailed. To go out without it would mean being called back at once. She tied it on slowly, with an impatient little jerk of the strings, then crept out, and walked soberly down through the garden. At the foot of the hill, before the turn into the meadows, a path led across a cornfield, and to the foot of another hill where the State's Prison stood, its dark walls frowning down on the mill brook and the cattle feeding near it. Long ago, as she looked up to the narrow windows, a prisoner had waved his handkerchief to her, and since then Margaret had spent hours watching them. She had read the story of Silvio Pellico in an old "Penny Magazine," and her head was full of what might be endured by the unhappy prisoners shut in by the thick walls. Once she had even asked grandmother if Randy might not take her there, because it might comfort the prisoners to see a child; but Madam Coolidge had looked astonished, and said, "What do you know about prisoners? Don't be silly, Margaret!" and there was nothing more to be said.

To-day she barely looked up as she skirted the hill and came out presently on the old road to the mountain, bordered for some distance by little houses lived in by people who worked in the factory at the upper village. She ran till they were all passed and the turn in the road came, where, by crawling under the bars of a fence, a path showed itself leading straight down to the swamp. Wild cherries and elderberry bushes grew so thickly against the fence that nobody could see the path. She would never have known it was there if little Tom Culligan, who brought raspberries, had not told her, in an ever-to-be-remembered conversation, interrupted by grandmother at the most

interesting part. He had come from the swamp, had even thrown a stone into Punk Hole, and had begun to tell of a house on the other side, long ago forsaken by the Kanucks who had tenanted it. Should she ever see him again and hear the rest?

Margaret ran down the path without a shadow of fear. She hardly knew herself. The pines whispered over her head, and the thick carpet of needles on which she stepped deadened her footfall. Never had there been anything so silent. There was not even a bird-note or the chirp of a grasshopper. The wild grapes were in blossom, and the delicious sweetness seemed almost like a voice, as the wind brought it to her from the thickets below. She had taken off her sun-bonnet and hung it on her arm; and now, as the wood opened, and she could see across the swamp to the pines on the other side, she stood still and listened. Something was moving there. The bushes parted, and a child a little older than herself appeared there, her black hair flying, and a red handkerchief tied about her neck. She looked critically at the hummocks near her; then jumped from one to another fearlessly, till near the edge of the Hole itself, where she stooped to gather something. Margaret watched her, absorbed in conjecture. This must be the duke's child, and perhaps this ragged dress was only to disguise her real rank. Dr. Phelps seemed to know it; but then he knew everything. People had to tell him everything, whether they wanted to or not. Miranda, in the "Tempest," was not ragged, but that was because Ariel or Caliban could bring her anything she wanted. Perhaps this child could have better things if she liked. Now, if she could only speak to her! She must. There might never be such another chance. But how? Ferdinand called Miranda "noble mistress" and "admired Miranda," but neither seemed just what was best.

The question settled itself. The child had filled her hands, and now, as she rose and turned suddenly, saw Margaret, and, after a long look, called: "What do you want? Who are you?"

"I'm Margaret, and I want you."

"What for?"

"Only to see you."

The child hesitated.

"Come here," she called at last.

"I can't. I don't dare. I should fall in."

"No, you won't. Do the way I do; jump right on the hummocks. They're hard. I'll come part way."

Margaret jumped recklessly. It was all part of the general iniquity; and even if she fell in, it could make matters no worse. But the first hummock was firm. She sprang to another, and found herself still on solid ground. With each jump she gained confidence. The child had paused, and her black eyes watched her approvingly, while Margaret's grew more and more full of pleasure. At last they were side by side. The hummock trembled under the double load, but she did not care. She held the child's hand, and looked at her rejoicingly.

"Are you really the duke's little daughter?" she said, with a wonder at her own daring in clinging to a creature so distinguished. "Oh, I'm so sorry for you to be shut up down here. Perhaps there is a Caliban to help you, though; the other duke had a Caliban, you know. Has your father?"

"Ben, you mean. But who told you there was Ben? He's in the prison."

"Oh, well, then he can't do you any harm, can he? Are n't you glad? Did Ariel put him there? I never thought there might be an Ariel here. Is there? Can I see him?"

Margaret's cheeks had grown pink, and her eyes

shone. This was an enchanted land, and her dreams were true, after all. The child looked at her curiously.

"There 's Abram," she said; "do you mean Abram? I should n't think you 'd want to see him. Ain't you afraid?"

"Not if he 's good as he used to be," Margaret said. "Can I? Will you take me to him?"

The girl laughed, and looked at Margaret in wonder.

"Come along," she said. "You 're queer. I 'd knock anybody else into the Hole that asked so many questions. Who sent you?"

"Nobody," Margaret said. "I came. I wanted to talk to you. Your name is n't Miranda too, is it?"

"No; it 's Meg. Now go easy. The hummocks here are shaky."

Margaret followed her lead. The water rose and fell under every motion. Jack-in-the-pulpits, taller than any she had ever seen, were in great clumps between the hummocks; but she resisted the temptation to reach after some, and followed steadily. Then came no longer water, but mud — black, slimy mud — between her and the firm ground toward which she jumped. Meg caught her, for one foot had slipped and sunk deep. Margaret drew it out and looked at it recklessly. Nothing so awful had ever been seen by grandmother's eyes, and it should not be seen. She rubbed it off on the grass first, and then with handfuls of leaves, till the worst was disposed of; and Margaret gave a little skip as she looked down at her small legs, — one in snowy white, the other hopelessly black.

"I don't care, unless it should make the duke angry," she said.

"He is n't here," Meg answered; "and you 'd better be glad he is n't. Come along; and if granny tries to drive you off, don't you mind, — you can run."

Margaret hesitated, but it was too late. Already they were in the shadow of the lonely house, and in another moment Meg had pulled Margaret in, and she stood in amazement too great for terror. At its best the dwelling had been only a low, cramped tenement of three rooms, in which shiftless and helpless Martin Smith had packed away the tribe of little Smiths that, as they grew up, made haste to seek a living in some more promising spot. Long ago Martin had been gathered to his fathers, at which time Mrs. Martin, who had at one meal never known with any certainty where the next was to come from, walked over to the poor-farm and took possession, with a cheerful sense that there at last was a place where, whatever might happen, three meals a day of something were, at least, certain.

Since then wandering Kanucks had taken up temporary quarters there; but abounding muskrats were not sufficient compensation for being at such distance from all chance of companionship, and a few weeks generally ended their occupation. Month by month mould and damp and all unseen and potent forces had worked their will; and Margaret, as she looked about the narrow room, smoke-grimed and cobwebbed, the plaster clinging in patches here and there, the window-frames stuffed with rags where glass should have been, was conscious only of something so miserable, so beyond any possibility her little life had ever known, that she could not understand how human beings bore it for a moment, and a duke above and beyond all. Was that a human being on the floor, — that creature twisted and misshapen, his great head set deep in his shoulders, and his slow, unwinking eyes fixed on hers? It was Caliban! and she stood in breathless terror, returning the look, till the great mouth opened, and a hoarse laugh came from it.

"Can't you never be quiet?" a cracked and quavering voice cried, aiming a blow that the figure dodged; and Margaret looked toward the speaker, an old woman sitting on a block before the fire, a clay pipe in her mouth, her wisp of gray hair matted and uncombed, and a red shawl crossed in front and tied behind over a ragged dress. Near her, on another block, sat a man scraping a muskrat skin, and at his side, on the floor, was a younger one asleep.

"That's father," Meg said. "I did n't know he had come."

Margaret's eyes were fastened on him; and as he looked up and met her look of mingled consternation and awe, he gazed for a moment and then laughed aloud. The old woman turned her little twinkling eyes, set in smoke-reddened rims, resting without surprise or interest on the new-comer. Margaret shrank back. The man's face was a handsome one,— brilliant black eyes, a head covered with close curls of black hair, and flashing white teeth in the full mouth which gave plain indication of its owner's grossness. Margaret felt that something was wrong, yet moved nearer as he beckoned to her.

"What are you doing here?" he said. "Where did you 'light from?"

His voice was deep and pleasant; and Margaret, a little reassured, answered,—

"I came over because I wanted to see you."

The man laughed again.

"That's a good one. Who sent you?"

"Nobody; I just came. You see, I never saw a duke, and I wanted to so much. Did you get shipwrecked? and is that the reason you have to stay in this dreadful place?"

"She's foolin' you," the old woman said, reaching for a stick near her. "Meg's set her on. There's something under it."

The man's face darkened.

"Tell what you've come for, or it'll be the worse for you," he said. "We don't think nothin' of choppin' up a little boy or a gal."

Margaret had grown very pale, but stood her ground. Ferdinand had been threatened dreadfully when he was first tossed on the island, and Prospero had been as unkind as he was afterward kind. Perhaps this duke behaved in the same way, and it was the custom of all dukes. Perhaps he did not know about Prospero, and ought to be told; and Margaret began in her soft little voice, —

"I'll tell you all about it. There is an island far off — oh! very far off — in an ocean where it storms awfully almost all the time; and this other duke lived there, and had a beautiful daughter."

"I'll be hung if she ain't tellin' a fairy tale," said the man. "She's crazy as a loon. Well, go ahead! Let's hear what came of it."

Margaret leaned against the door and went on. Meg crouched on the floor near her and listened silently; the cripple dragged himself back to the fire and stared at her; and the old woman, after a contemptuous grunt or two, relighted her pipe, and bent forward as before.

"When the Doctor said the duke's child had brought him the flowers," Margaret ended at last, "I knew by what he said that you were in trouble. Of course you are not that very same duke, only it seemed so for a little while; but I wanted to see you and tell you how sorry I was for you."

She had forgotten fear, or anything but her desire to help; and the man looked at her with another laugh, that ended in almost a groan.

"I wish more folks had been of your mind," he said, "but I sha'n't forget what you took me for. I'm a Duke, sure enough, but it ain't your kind. It's

a kind you 'd better keep away from, for we 're past helping by God or man. We don't want it, neither, any more than folks want to give it; so we 're suited all round. Take her off, Meg, an' don't let her come here again. We 're the devil's own; an' if you don't believe it, go home an' ask your folks. Run now!"

He shook the stick threateningly, but there was no threat in his eyes.

"Are you very wicked?" Margaret said, her clear eyes fixed steadily on his.

"Goin' to hell full tilt, they say; down hill an' cross lots, too, an' the sooner the better. Now run, I say, an' don't come within smell o' sulphur again, or I 'll let loose on ye."

"Come," Meg said. "He 'll be after us in a minute if you don't."

Margaret turned slowly, pity and sorrow still struggling in her little mind, and followed Meg, crossing the swamp once more and looking back, as she touched firm ground again, to the shadow of the great trees half hiding the thin blue thread of smoke from the crumbling chimney.

"You may have the flowers," Meg said, filling her hands with the arethusas; "I don't want 'em."

"I want to give you something," Margaret answered, "but I have n't got anything but my handkerchief and my carnelian ring. Can you wear the ring?"

Meg slipped it on her grimy little finger, and laughed with pleasure as she saw how it fitted.

"I can get another some time," Margaret said. "Good-by, Meg. I don't suppose I ever shall run away again, and so I sha'n't see you. I won't ever forget you. If they would only let me, I 'd —"

Margaret stopped. It was no use even to think of coming again, much less that Meg might come to her. She climbed the hill, turning as the path narrowed.

Meg was still standing there, and she was crying. Margaret looked a moment, her heart full of sympathy; but as she called, "I won't forget, Meg! I won't ever forget!" Meg rushed away and was lost in a thicket of alder. Margaret walked on, too lost in thought to dread meeting any one. Her sunbonnet still hung on her arm, but she did not remember to put it on. Something must be done, and she ran faster and faster. Grandfather sometimes listened to her, and he must listen now. "Poor sinners, going down to hell," the minister had said only last Sunday, of the heathen he was preaching about. "Oh, my brethren! what will be your condemnation if one soul suffers through your neglect!"

Randy had explained it all to her. It meant all the wicked people everywhere. Margaret wondered why God had chosen to make them wicked; but if he had, of course people must do all they could about it. Her cheeks burned. This was just as bad. The duke had said he was going to the same place, and, of course, he could be stopped. Margaret burst into the library, — such an entrance as had never before been made, — and Madam Coolidge, who stood there with a somewhat anxious face, sank into a chair and gasped with horror as she saw the disreputable little figure, usually so spotless.

"Grandfather!" Margaret cried. "O grandfather! I want you to do something quick before the duke goes to hell. Come right back with me, and I'll show you the way."

"Where?" the old Squire said, roused out of all possibility of evasion, and meeting the demand as simply as Margaret herself.

"Down in Punk Hole, grandfather. I've been right to the edge of everything, and I've been to the duke's house and seen every one of them. Come!"

The Squire actually reached out his hand for the

white beaver hat on the secretary, when Madam Coolidge's voice arrested him.

"Mr. Coolidge, if you have not gone stark, raving mad, as that child is, you will sit down and let me find out what she has been doing."

The old Squire dropped into the nearest chair, and looked at his wife.

"Come here, you wicked child!" pursued Madam Coolidge. "What did you run away for?"

"Because I was tired of everything, and wanted something different."

Madam Coolidge gasped again. She had never wanted anything different, and why should this defiant and shameless grandchild, in whom the Wentworth blood was evidently discovering itself, and who faced her with a look she had never seen?

"Wicked little girl!" she said. "You have disgraced yourself for life. You have been with people that nobody ever goes near, or ought to, and everybody in town will know it."

"I want grandfather to go and help them," persisted Margaret.

"Don't ever let me hear such a word again," said Madam Coolidge, in astonished displeasure. "Nobody helps such people. They ought to be in prison, every one of them. Go up to your room and go to bed."

"I want somebody to help them! Somebody must help them!" Margaret cried, bursting at last into a passion of sobs, that brought in Randy from the passage-way, where she had been lingering anxiously. Margaret ran to her, and threw her arms around her.

"You will, Randy!" she cried.

Take her away," Madam Coolidge said severely. "I don't know what's got into the child. She must be going to be sick."

Randy lifted Margaret and carried her upstairs, bathed her hot face, and undressed her gently.

"I'll fix it some way," she said. "Don't you fret so, my lamb. Just be good now, an' I'll fix it." And Margaret, soothed by the promise, drank a glass of milk, and presently fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, to toss restlessly from side to side and cry out, until Randy lay down by her and patted her with her great hand into quiet.

Margaret wandered restlessly about the house the next day, waiting for the afternoon, in which she took it for granted Randy would go with her, following her about till that ancient maiden was half beside herself. One excursion led at last to the back gate, where the butcher's wagon had stopped; and as Randy turned over the pieces of lamb distrustfully, Margaret started as he said, —

"There 's one good riddance for the town. Them Dukeses cleared out at daylight, bag an' baggage, an' not much o' either. They'll be back next year, I should n't wonder, about the time Ben's time is out."

Margaret burst into crying, and ran into the house; and Madam Coolidge, after a question or two, and an indignant sniff, as Margaret cried, "They 've gone, and now we can't ever do anything!" set her lips firmly in a look the Squire knew meant action.

A month later, Margaret, who since that eventful day had never seemed quite the same, found herself, with only a week of warning, and divided between expectation and resentment, seated by Randy in the old stage-coach; and as the driver cracked his long whip and the horses broke into a quickly checked gallop, looked her last for many a day on the old house and the village under the mountain.

II.

THE doors were all wide open. The heat shimmered and quivered in the air, and penetrated every corner of the great house. A languid bumble-bee droned over the mignonette under the window, and a locust shrilled overhead in the butternut-tree. The box-borders on either side the path to the gate felt the August sunshine; and their warm, aromatic breath mingled with that of the day lilies growing here and there in clumps, their pure whiteness gleaming against the dark background of shrub and tree. The child curled up in the arm-chair in the broad hall had long ago lost herself in the "Arabian Nights," and did not move as some one who had been standing in the doorway turned and passed into the library, with a smile at the curly head bent over the book. Little as her scholars might suspect it, there was perpetual satisfaction to this woman in their youth. Dainty coloring, flower-soft faces, small absurdities, gay little laughs at nothing, all held their own delight, and were enjoyed quite apart from the sense of responsibility involved in her relation to them.

"A musty old schoolmistress," she said, with a sigh and then a smile; "but, after all, it has its own compensations." And she turned to her work, stopping at moments as the heat seemed to pulse and throb almost audibly, or a louder blast was shrilled by a rival locust across the way. Voices sounded at last from the garden. She heard them rising and falling in excited talk. Then came a rush down the hall,

and her door was suddenly flung open and then nearly closed again, a small pair of hands clutching the knob frantically.

"Miss Lyman! Oh, Miss Lyman! Margaret Wentworth's locked up in the poor-farm, and they're going to take her to jail!"

Miss Lyman was not easily moved. Years of experience in every type of girl had taught her precisely the degree of exaggeration to be expected from each; but there must be some foundation for anything as wild as this.

"He's out there! He's coming in!" pursued the speaker, holding the door open the slightest crack, and looking wildly through it. "Oh, goodness me! Will they hang her?"

"Hush, you foolish child! Go away, and I will tell you when I know anything myself. What is it, Martha?"

The decorous serving-maid looked as bewildered as poor Sally Hobbs herself, who retreated in tears, and sat in the hall watching Miss Lyman's door.

"It's Byers, from the poor-farm," she said; "and Miss Margaret's got herself into some awful trouble. She's gone and let some wild critter loose, and Byers has locked her up to skeer her. He was for bustin' right in, and he wants to see you."

"Tell him to come in," Miss Lyman said quietly, and turned to her writing-table. Byers pushed in as she spoke, — a little man, with hair and whiskers so fiery red that they seemed to dart flame as he spoke.

"I hain't no time to be foolin' round," he began in a high-pitched voice, his tone changing as Miss Lyman looked at him steadily. "That gal o' yourn has done a fine job. I've let her come an' go 'ithout interferin', because you've been with her there yourself, an' it keeps the old folks contented to see folks once in a while. But I didn't bargain for no sich

doin's, me nor Mis' Byers. To let a critter like that loose! It's accessory before the fact, that's what it is. We ll have to take the law of her, sure 's you 're born."

"Sit down, Elijah, and see if you can tell me rationally what has happened."

"Oh, Jehoshaphat! there ain't no rational in it!" said Mr. Byers, falling into a chair and rubbing his forehead distractedly with a yellow cotton handkerchief. "I would n't 'a' tied her if she had n't been tryin' to git away off an' on for a month. They had n't no right to pass her on to me, anyhow. S'posin' 't is her township, she 's been out of it long enough."

Miss Lyman folded her hands and looked at the speaker with a twinkle which came in spite of her anxiety.

"Who is it you have tied up?" she said. "Miss Wentworth?"

Mr. Byers blushed a scarlet only less vivid than his hair. "I was powerful mad when I first came in," he said, "an' I don' know but I said somethin' about tyin.' I did lock her up. I was bound to give her one good scare, an' all the more becoz she did n't care one cent. It 's that old critter they sent on from the mill-village, — her name 's slipped jest now, but 't ain't no matter anyway, — she that hed delirium trimmins, an' like to died, an' then some kind o' low fever. Mis' Byers took all the care o' her anybody 'd expect, — care enough; an' there! soon 's she begun to mend she 'd slip off, night or any time, bound to git away. Fust I locked the doors, an' she clim out o' the winder, an' I was jest in time to head her off; an' then I made a good bed in the old corn-house, off beyond the barn, plenty o' straw, — she ain't used to nothin' better, — an' jest put her in there an' tied her to one o' the posts. Plenty o' leeway. She could move round well enough; but I 'm a master hand for

knots, an' I knew them was beyond her, an' I looked out she had n't no knife nor nothin' to cut 'em. It 's pleasant weather, an' 't ain't a bad place. She hollered an' groaned, at first, like to drive us all distracted; but most of 'em 's deaf anyway, an' we got used to it. I was goin' out from noon-spell, an' I sort of thought I saw somethin' stirrin' in the edge o' the woods, but I did n't pay much attention. I had a basin o' succotash — fust-rate, too — Mis' Byers hed made a kettle of it — an' I went along to the door, an' there it was wide open, an' your gal a-settin' there bold as brass. 'What 's the meanin' o' this tantrum?' sez I. 'This ain't a prison,' sez she, cool as a cucumber. 'I think you 're a wicked man to tie up a poor old woman so, and I 've just let her go.' 'You untied them knots?' sez I, struck all of a heap. 'Oh, no!' sez she, cooler yit. 'I cut 'em.' That riled me wust of all. A new rope I had n't had more 'n a month. I jest pulled the door shet, an' then I see I 'd left the key sticking in the padlock. I locked it, and come off. I was a good mind to go straight to the constable. 'T would n't hurt her to keep her there all night. Now, what you goin' to do about it?"

Mr. Byers's tone had grown milder as he went on; but he frowned resolutely, bent upon justice, and looking severely at Miss Lyman, whom he suspected of too decided a leaning to mercy.

"I shall drive over about five," she said. "I will attend to the case myself, Elijah, and I advise you to say very little about it. There are one or two questions I should find it very easy to ask if you did. On the whole, you manage the farm better than some others have done, but I know your methods pretty well."

"An' you make out it 's all right for anybody that likes, to come along an' open the doors to whoever they 've a mind to?"

"Not at all. Miss Wentworth did wrong, but I do not doubt that she saw a sight that a good deal justifies her."

"There can't no one say I don't treat 'em decently," Byers began angrily.

"I think that the system is much more to blame than you, but there are a good many things you could mend."

Byers blushed again as he met the steady look.

"I guess I 'd better be goin'," he said, and with a shame-faced nod and a muffled "Arternoon," shuffled out. Miss Lyman shook her head, laughed for a moment, then, with a grave face, leaned back in her chair, pondering what should be said. A stifled sob came to her ears presently, and she stepped into the hall.

"Poor Sally!" she said. "I did not mean to leave you so long. Don't mind any more. I am going for Margaret myself, and you need say nothing about it. You will have her at tea, you faithful little friend."

Sally smiled through her tears. There was approval in the tone; and even a look from Miss Lyman was more than most people's words. Nothing could be very wrong with Margaret; and Sally went away comforted, wondering what Margaret had really done, and if anybody would ever know exactly.

The unconscious object of all the excitement had, when the morning was half gone, suddenly tied on her hat and set out on one of the expeditions in which she seldom allowed a companion. To get away from the village was her first thought, and she walked swiftly under the arching elms that, for a mile, made of the wide street a green and silent arcade. Then she turned to the west and entered presently a wood, through which the road ran at will, curving here and there, and always greener and more silent as the trees grew closer and the great clumps

of brake and fern denser and darker. Margaret sat down on a log by the roadside, threw off her hat, and, reaching back a little to a thicket of blackberries, picked and ate, choosing the ripest, and thus exciting the angry objections of a striped squirrel, which, at first startled, had returned to the end of a bough opposite her, and sat there swelling with indignation and chattering with fury at each berry picked. Margaret stopped and looked at him gravely, — a course of action apparently still more reprehensible, for the squirrel darted up the tree and returned in a moment, reinforced by an equally aggrieved one, the two balancing themselves on the same bough, and giving all their strength to a vehement protest against intruders.

"I have just as good a right here as you have," Margaret said at last, after the fits of laughter which only increased their resentment. "Don't you know, you silly things, that the world belongs to all of us, and that you've got to go shares with me whether you want to or not? I'm going, anyway, but I'd like to stay long enough to prove it to you;" with which rankly socialistic statement Margaret picked up her hat and moved off slowly, leaving the pair satisfied in the faith that their efforts had routed this insolent intruder.

"That's adventure number one," she said. "Now I wonder what will happen next!"

The beautiful wood ended presently; and as she walked on, happily expectant, she came out on a lonely stretch of pasture-land, beyond which the town farm lay, the forest closing in at its back. It was her favorite walk. There were no tramps to molest or make afraid, and Miss Lyman for the last year or two had given her full freedom in the long summer days, in which she sometimes botanized, but oftener rambled on, content with being in the open

air. It was a privilege seldom accorded the pupils whose vacation was spent at school; but Miss Lyman knew the nature she dealt with, and believed freedom as essential here as its deprivation might be in another case. It was this freedom, as well as the fact that she was so often the principal's companion in long rides about the country, that had made her known even more than others as "Miss Lyman's gal;" and the title carried free admission not only to the poor-farm, but to various secluded farm-houses where Margaret stopped for a drink of milk or a talk over things in general.

Each year Madam Coolidge had found some excellent reason why the girl's vacations should be spent at school, till now, at fifteen, the arrangement was taken for granted. One or two of the Southern pupils did it in any case; and there was always an excursion of some sort, before a term reopened, to Canada, or Niagara, or the White Mountains. Margaret made no objection. She longed to see Randy, to whom she wrote once a fortnight, the alternate week being to grandmother; and she pined often for a sight of the mountain brooding over the little village, and, shutting her eyes, saw again the stretch of meadow and the winding brook under the buttonwood-trees. The sense of something lacking grew stronger as she saw what home and family meant to other girls, and wondered if she were more heartless or so unlovable that none of those who knew her best could care. Randy cared,—but then Randy was Randy, and would care anyway,—and the girls cared, and even some of the teachers. But always, even when most sure of this, a certain loneliness was part of the child's life, and it did not lessen as she passed into girlhood.

She did not talk of it, and no one ever heard her speak much of her old life. But it was quite plain to the wise woman who ruled them all. Her quiet gray eyes saw everything and betrayed nothing; and with

her Margaret had come to have, in spite of a little awe, the sense of a friendship strong enough to accomplish whatever might be needed, and understanding every fact so well that there was no occasion for talking about it.

Each day came finally to be a thanksgiving that she had been sent here rather than anywhere else, but she accepted the happy fortune with only occasional wonder as to how it had come about. She did not know how widespread a name and reputation belonged not only to Byington, but to another school within an hour or two of it, the two owning an influence envied and uncomprehended by rival schools. Not the most active and eager of centres in New England educational life had proved so real a power as that emanating from the two quiet little towns, so remote that even the experienced traveller questions for a moment how to reach them. There they lie, among the circling hills, on streams so gentle that the prospector for factory sites passes them by, and, happily for the peace of both, makes no pause till half a dozen miles beyond. In the one, a man very plain to look upon, utterly unassuming in speech and manner, lived his life among children,—boys who came to him at nine or ten, labelled usually "hard cases," and who, no matter how it might fare with their brains, came, under his administration, to own hearts and souls far too big to fit into the measure ordained by the disciples of culture to-day. Not that brains suffered. On the contrary, from no point in the country has come out the same proportion of men who know their gift and how to use it. But being meant much more than doing, and all learning counted but little if the pupil failed to learn also the lesson no book has held, and to find in self-mastery and thought for others the key to a content no chance of life can weaken or destroy.

The other touched the heart of life less nearly, yet did, and still does, for girls, in part, the same work.

Conventionality had larger share, as was perhaps inevitable; but it was a conventionality that gave no place to shams, and that made simplicity and delicacy the keynote of character and manner. A lady in every fibre, and a lady of the old school at that, with a courtesy that to the new-comer seemed a little appalling, the mistress was conservative only up to a certain point, and followed every advance in thought, watching its trend with unflagging interest, and introducing new methods whenever their right to existence had been demonstrated. Opposition made no difference. The conservative parent who objected to anything new was told that all vacancies could be instantly filled, and from year to year the candidates for admission far exceeded any power of reception, till the school represented, at last, the best and highest that private management had then accomplished.

Nothing could have been more fortunate for Margaret than Madam Coolidge's slowly formed resolution to place her in this most decorous, most secluded and desirable establishment, the terms of which were so high that few objectionable people could find admittance. Money, a generation or so ago, meant a personal value hardly included in the word to-day. The fortunes represented were pittances compared with the millions of the present; but they were fortunes still, earned by slow and dignified accumulation, and spent in the same fashion. By this standard the Squire was rich. The one inspiration of his early legal life had been the compilation of a small manual, which proved indispensable to every law student, and the royalty from which, added to his own income, made him henceforth independent. Spending little, indifferent as to the decay of the old place, the elaborate care of which had been his father's passion, he ceased active practice, and gave his leisure to the composition of verses on the feasts and fasts of the Protestant Episcopal Church

in America, much reading of the Greek and Latin Fathers, and an occasional translation from Horace. The little fortune destined for Margaret's mother had grown year by year. The Wentworth inheritance had been added; and, unconsciously to herself, Margaret at twenty-one would command an income for which at present she had small preparation and hardly a desire. She dreamed now and then of being rich, and of helping everybody who came to her in trouble; for in any future this was always included, — that somehow she must help. In the mean time she had her lessons, and all the round of work and play that the day brought, and that was enough.

To-day the great barn-doors of the poor-farm stood open. The hay had been brought in, and the sweet scent filled the air. Margaret delighted in a barn, and this carried a sense of amplitude that even its degeneracy into a town-farm barn could not destroy. She sat down in the doorway to rest a moment, resolving to climb to the top loft and have one slide down before anybody could see, and then, leaning against the door-post, she looked down toward the pasture. The old corn-house, set up on posts, a foot or two above the ground, was hardly a stone's throw away; and as she sat, a sound came from it, — a long, low groan that brought her to her feet with a sudden startled sense of something uncanny. In a moment she smiled.

"Byers has locked up one of the children there, — poor little wretches!" she thought. "I wonder if I can reach that hole in the side that does for a window, and see which one. It 's that forlorn little Timothy. Something happens to him every day."

The barn hid all out-buildings from the house, and Margaret felt entirely secure as she went toward the corn-house, and, standing on tiptoe, just failed to reach the opening.

"Is that you, Timothy?" she called.

"Yes," a voice answered faintly; and Margaret sped round to the door, found to her delight that the key was sticking in the padlock, and in a moment was in the musty little den.

"Where are you?" she said, her eyes dimmed by the sudden shadow after sunlight. "Have you been having another whipping, Timothy?"

Something stirred in the straw, sat up, and, parting matted hair from before two bleared and red-rimmed eyes, looked at Margaret without a word. She could see plainly now, and for a moment shrank back, then stood still. Where had she seen the evil old face, and eyes with this same look of cunning and curiosity? It must be one of the crazy patients, and, with an instinct of fear, she turned.

"Don't go away! don't! Oh, for the love o' God, let me loose!" the voice cried. "Don't you be skeered. I sha'n't do any harm. I jest want to git to my own kin, and they hain't no right to hender me. I ain't poor, I ain't a town pauper nowheres. Meg'll look after me. There's Meg, an' there's Ben, an' I'm hearty yit. I kin look out for myself if they'll only let me go. He's tied me up like a dog. Ain't you willin' to let me loose?"

Margaret had stood looking at the cowering, wretched figure, with its strange sense of familiarity, and now she cried: "Why, you are Meg's grandmother! the duke's mother! Where are they all?"

"They're a-waitin' for me," the old woman said. "I don't know who you be. Whoever you be, lemme go, an' I'll give you good luck every day you have to live."

"I'm Margaret Wentworth, that came over the swamp to Punk Hole with Meg, long ago," said Margaret. "Oh, how I wish I knew if I ought to help you! What have you been doing?"

"Nothing; not a thing but havin' a fever an' gettin' well ag'in. I got it in the damp down in the other poor-house, an' then they passed me on here. I ain't a pauper, I tell you. I don't want nothin' o' no one but to be let go. If I 'd a tooth left that met anywheres, I 'd 'a' had this rope through before now. You 'll bring me a knife, won't you, dearie? Maybe you've got a knife in your pocket now. These is master knots, an' they won't give, nohow."

"Where is the duke?" Margaret said, still hesitating.

"They all live over in a house in the Weathersfield woods; Meg an' all. Meg 'd like to know you let her old granny git loose an' go hum ag'in."

Tears were running down the wrinkled, smoke-dried old face.

"Don't turn away! don't! Let me go!" she pleaded.

Margaret hesitated no longer. By her own love of freedom she gauged what it must be to be tied here helpless in the dark. She took out her pocket-knife, — a strong one, for she dug roots and used it otherwise in boy fashion, — and a minute or two of energetic sawing severed the rope, the loose end of which the old woman wound around her and tucked under her shawl, crossed and tied behind as Margaret had first seen it.

"It 's a good rope, an' strong, too," she said; "strong enough to hang Byers, an' I 'd like to see it used that way."

She scuttled through the door as she spoke, looked cautiously around, and, stepping down, stole along the fence and toward the woods, crouching low as she went. Margaret watched her a moment, then closed the door and walked back toward the wood from which she had come. Her heart beat fast; it beat faster, and she cried out involuntarily, as a voice from the bushes beyond her said, —

"I 'd like to know just what it 's all about, anyway."

The speaker sat on a fallen log at the turn in the road, hidden from Margaret by a clump of wild cherry, but in full sight of the corn-house. Evidently he had seen the whole transaction; and Margaret stood, her eyes fixed upon him, and with no sense left by which she could judge what his intentions might be.

"It won't be much bother to get after the old lady and see her to her quarters again, but I won't interfere if you can give any good reason for the operation."

Margaret was very pale, and looked at the speaker with a desperate wish to rush by him and so escape. He was only a boy in face, though tall, and with big hands and feet, to which he was still to grow. His eyes had danced as he looked at Margaret's terrified face; but they sobered now, and she saw that they were kindly but keen gray eyes, deep-set, and looking out from under a broad brow sunburned up to the point where the hat came, where a distinct line of white met the wonderful shock of deep auburn hair, combed straight back, but electing to stand in all directions save at the back, where it lay in great waves, the beauty of which was altogether wasted on a boy's head. His eyes searched her face, — eyes that meant to see justice done, but inclined to mercy also. That this was not one of the country girls was plain, and it was equally plain that he had not come from any of the farms about. A tin case was slung at his side, and in his hand was a bottle into which a squirming something had just been slipped. Margaret saw it half unconsciously, just as she saw the freckles on his face, the white teeth, and the square, determined chin.

"Do you know her?" he asked again, as she still stood silent, not questioning his right to ask, and looking at him with her clear, direct gaze, which did not falter even when she was most afraid.

"Yes, I knew her when I was little," she said at last. "I 'll tell you all about it. She 's a very miserable, wretched old woman, shut up here away from all her own people. Byers, the man that keeps the town farm, tied her up like a wild animal, when all she wanted was to get back to her own place. There are Meg and the duke — I mean they were in Edgeton long ago — her children and grandchildren, you know, and I knew how Meg would feel if she knew her grandmother was tied up, and so I just cut the rope. I 'm glad I let her go. Nobody had any business to tie her up so."

"There comes somebody who won't like it as well as you seem to."

Margaret turned. Byers was shuffling slowly down the road, a tin pan in his hand.

"What are you going to do? Run?" asked the boy.

"Of course I shall run," said Margaret. "Why should n't I?"

"Being a girl, I suppose you will. A boy, with pluck enough to do it, would face the music all the way through. Not that I much blame you for running."

"I sha'n't run," said Margaret, decisively. "I 'm not afraid to tell Byers."

A loud holloa resounded through the woods.

"That 's my uncle," the lad said, as the shout was repeated, and he gave an answering one. "I 've got to go, but I 'll stay a little if you like."

Margaret had already disappeared, the last fold of her dress whisking into the little building as he spoke.

"By George! I 'd like to know how it comes out," he said, with another shout as the call was repeated. "I 'll rush across and tell uncle the lark, and then back again The old woman 's well off by this time."

He plunged into the wood and disappeared. Byers had now reached the corn-house. He stood pondering how he could have left the key in the padlock, and started back in fright as, pushing open the door, he saw the girl's slender figure standing before him.

The result we know. It was the work of a moment to lock her in when he had realized the extent of her enormity; and Margaret, who had at first made a wild dash at the window, sat down at last on the straw, and said to herself again that she was glad. Of course Byers had gone after Miss Lyman, and that was very dreadful. She had meant to make instant confession when she got back; but Miss Lyman would listen to her. She might decide to punish her in some way, and if so, it must be taken quietly; only — and here she raised her head and listened. Quick steps were nearing her prison, and in a moment a head appeared at the window.

"Holloa! So that 's the way it has turned, is it? What 's to be done?"

"Nothing," said Margaret. "Byers has gone after Miss Lyman, I suppose, and she will take me out. He said he was going for the constable. I don't believe it at all. I don't mind. It was horrid the first minute, but I think I am really glad, because now I know how it feels to be locked up."

"She 's a cool one," she heard the boy say, as some one took his place at the window. Margaret could barely see through the narrow opening that it was an older face, with something comfortable and reassuring in look and voice.

"We are going to stay with you," the new-comer said, "till your friend comes for you."

"Thank you," Margaret answered hesitatingly. "I don't mind. I 'm not afraid. I wish you would n't."

"I think we may find that I have a right to," he

said. "Paul here tells me your name is Margaret Wentworth. Are you one of the Deepmouth Wentworths?"

"My father was," Margaret answered with pride. "He was Lieutenant John Wentworth; and I always wear his picture in a locket, — the same one he gave my mother."

"Then there is the best reason in the world why I should stay here and get acquainted, as far as that is practicable through an eighteen by twelve inch hole; for I knew your father all his life, and I have charge of the property still."

"I did n't know there was any property," said Margaret. "I don't care about that, but I wish you 'd tell me about him! Oh, if I could only see you!"

"That will come later," the voice said; and then began an extraordinary conversation, in which Margaret, who had accepted the stranger without a doubt, plied him with questions, and he, in turn, learned more of her life than any one, save Miss Lyman, had ever done. She had told him presently the story of the duke, and had come to her reasons for letting the old woman go, when she heard the sound of wheels and then of voices. The talk lasted some minutes, — an hour, it seemed to her, as she waited. Then she heard the padlock removed, and the door flew open, a tall figure taking her hand, and leading her out with an amused but kindly scrutiny.

"Miss Lyman will tell you about me," he said; "and to-morrow, with her permission, I shall come and see you, and finish our talk. Now I have to follow Paul, who has gone on to tell our camping party that I am on the way. Good-by till to-morrow."

"It 's turned into consid'able of a party," Byers said, with a grin, as Miss Lyman drove away, and the tall figure struck out into the woods. "All the

same, I guess she ain't likely to forgit how it feels to be locked up, an' I don't mind havin' hed a chance to do it. 'T ain't every day a high-flyer like her gits caught jest so."

"Well, Margaret," Miss Lyman said, after a long silence, in which Margaret had stolen glances at her now and then, uncertain whether to begin herself or wait, "Byers has told his story, and I am ready for yours."

"I want to tell you every word, from the very beginning, that you never knew about," Margaret said, with a long sigh of relief, as she poured out the story of the afternoon. "Now, was it so very dreadful?" she ended at last.

"We do not know," Miss Lyman said gravely. "She is a very wicked old woman, and has never done anything but harm. She may do much more. Byers did wrong to tie her; but don't you see that he was at his wits' end, and that you had no right to take the matter into your own hands? She drinks and steals, and teaches every child that belongs to her to do the same. On the whole, she was better off there than anywhere else, because she had no chance to do wrong."

"But she could n't help it. Nobody ever taught any of them anything," Margaret said. "I know. Even grandfather said nobody must go near them, because they were so bad. It is n't their fault if God made them so, only I don't see what He did it for."

"Hush!" said Miss Lyman. "He never makes any one wicked. They grow so, and they are always responsible for growing so."

"If nobody teaches them, I don't see why they should be," Margaret persisted.

"But people have tried, and they refused to learn."

"They have n't tried right, then," Margaret said

confidently. "I was little, I know; but I can see the duke's eyes this minute, — just the way he threw his head back, and laughed, and said, 'I wish other folks had been more of your mind.' Miss Lyman, I can't help it. I 'd do it over again this minute. I don't mean that I don't see. I do; and if you say so, I 'll tell Byers that I know I had n't any what he 'd call right to interfere. But I will interfere all my life when things get all wrong. I will! I will!" and Margaret, upon whom the long strain had produced its effect, burst into passionate crying. Miss Lyman laid down the reins. They were still in the wood; and the pony, well used to stops at unexpected places, dropped his head, and proceeded to select whatever was most desirable in the green growth at his side. Miss Lyman drew the sobbing figure to her, and Margaret laid her head on her shoulder, and cried till the tears had had their way, and she looked up gratefully.

"We will say nothing more about it," the perplexed principal said at last. "I do not know myself exactly what I ought to do, and we will wait and see. I shall trust you, however, to come to me first before you let any more prisoners loose."

"You are the best person in the whole world!" Margaret cried, with an impulsive hug, which Miss Lyman's dignity would seem to have forbidden, but which was heartily returned; and the pair drove on quietly, Margaret leaning back and feeling as if she had journeyed to some unknown country and come home again.

"Who was that nice gentleman?" she asked presently. "I had almost forgotten I did not know his name."

"He is Mr. Hartley Southernwood," Miss Lyman said; "a lawyer. I supposed he had seen you at your grandfather's."

"Oh, no," Margaret began in surprise. "I remember grandfather went to Boston once to see a lawyer, Randy said, but she did not know what for. Oh, Miss Lyman, do stop a minute! See what a beautiful girl!"

They had left the wood, and were nearing the winding stream between them and the village, crossed, a little beyond, by a short covered bridge. The girl stood before a high rock, from a cleft in which a spring slowly made its way and filtered into the ground below. Her feet were bare, and the scanty dark-blue gown was ragged and dirty; but the superb young figure, supple and tall, with long rounded arms, and a head crowned with thick braids of black hair, was like nothing Margaret had ever seen. She turned, at the sound of wheels, a face rich in coloring as that of a southern Italian; black eyes flashing under the low brow, and full red lips above the dimpled chin. She looked at them steadily, a vague wonder replacing the scowl with which she had turned. Then her face lighted with a sudden smile, her white teeth gleaming, and her figure bending forward eagerly. The smile faded instantly. She drew back; and as Margaret, who had sprung up, cried out, "It's Meg! O Meg! come here! You know me, don't you?" sprang back into the thickets on the other side, and ran fleetly toward the wood.

"Meg! O Meg!" Margaret called; but there was no response, and she burst into tears again. "Why would n't she let me speak to her? She knew me. It was really Meg. Why would n't she?"

"Dear child, hush!" Miss Lyman said. "This is the reason probably. See there!"

Through the bridge came two men, one with bold black eyes, and a look as if he were ready for any form of mischief that might prove most convenient.

Behind him limped a figure Margaret had never forgotten, — distorted and misshapen, the great head rolling as he walked. He did not look up; but Margaret watched them both, her eyes falling before the evil look of the elder man, who hesitated a moment as if inclined to beg, then passed on.

"Yes, it was Meg," she said. "Now I know it was; for the dreadful one was on the floor that day, and perhaps the other was Ben."

Miss Lyman drove on swiftly. There had been quite enough excitement for that day; and she sent Margaret to bed at once when the house was reached, letting Sally take her some supper. Sally looked upon Margaret with awe, as one who had come through unutterable experiences, but obeyed orders and asked no questions; and Margaret sank presently into troubled sleep, and tossed till Miss Lyman came to her, and, like Randy in the old days, lay down by her and soothed her into quiet.

Margaret waited impatiently next day for her new friend's appearance. He would come in the afternoon, he had said; but tea-time came without him, and she went to it aggrieved and disturbed. A little later a messenger appeared with a note for both Miss Lyman and herself. He had been suddenly called to Boston, but hoped to return in a few days. The few days slipped into weeks at last. Business detained him always, and there were reasons evidently why he did not write. Margaret wondered and wished, and ended by putting away the memory of him, with other pictures for a season a little blurred by the transformation that eventful afternoon had wrought. Time gave each its own place at last, and she could see again the child Meg, with her handful of flowers held out to her, and think of her apart from that new and wonderful Meg reaching up to the stream trickling down the moss-covered rock. Some

day she would find her and talk as she would. Till then she must be patient; and so, in the steady round of work, the years went one by one, till womanhood waited the girl who felt herself at moments old as all the centuries, and then younger than childhood had ever found her.

III.

OLD PADGETT stirred uneasily, and then, rousing himself, sat up on his pile of rags and straw, and looked around. Through the street-sounds and the stir of life in the great tenement-house, something had crept in and found its way to his heavy ear. Noises of all sorts, — groans, shrieks, sudden crashes, long howls of rage or pain, — he knew all these, interpreted each as it came, and had small need for any sudden action or comment beyond, "There 's Mike at it ag'in!" or "Old Aunty 's ravin' dhrunk, an' in the crockery." This was different, and demanded attention.

"Wake up, Ellen, thin!" he called to another heap of rags near him; and while he waited for a reply, slowly picked the straws from his hair, eying each with a mild surprise, as if no good reason for its appearance had slightest existence.

"If Ellen won't rouse up, thin the boarder must," he said, after a few minutes of expectancy, aiming a boot at a dark object across the room, lying on the floor, and in an equally profound sleep, undisturbed by boot or call.

"They 're dumb fools, the both of 'em," old Padgett said serenely, as if stating a pleasant fact, and struggled to his feet. The ten by twelve room had a window, being in this respect much more fortunate than others on the same floor. Such light as the high walls all about allowed to enter the court made its way through the accumulation of dirt on the

narrow panes, and glanced here and there, as if loath to linger in the wretched den, bare of all furniture save a three-legged table propped against the wall, and a small cooking-stove upheld by bricks. A week before, there had been a bed and chairs, dishes in the pantry, and, if no comfort, at least some semblance of living. But, as old Padgett said to himself, "What 's atin' or dhrinkin' whin the thirst 's on a man ?"

When the week's wages were gone, Ellen and he and the boarder, who had borne so many names that old Padgett resigned attempt to cope with even one, had each taken turns in carrying one and another article down the long flights of shaky, evil-smelling stairs, to the pawnbroker's across the way, returning with its equivalent in whiskey. Private drinking, with only a picked companion or two, suited old Padgett much better than a bout in the bucket-shop. He was never quarrelsome. Ellen grew fierce, and cuffed him about, and then maudlin, and wept on his neck; but old Padgett — who was by no means old, but had received the title purely as a term of affection, significant of the general good-will toward him in the alley — smiled placidly, and drank on till there was no more to drink; waiting, still smiling, till more appeared. Even now, as he looked about the dismantled room, the smile was there, though a wavering and rueful one. Sense was coming back.

"By the powers, but it 's a clane sweep this time!" he said. "I 'll have to do some tall liftin' to get things in shape ag'in. Ellen! will ye wake or will ye not? Ye will not? Thin I 'll be afther seein' into the cause o' things meself; an' may the divil fly away wid me if I know what it is I 'd like to be doin'!"

Old Padgett stepped into the hall, and, steadying himself against the wall, listened again. The long, shuddering moan sounded once more. Certainly it

came from the room next the stairs, and he moved unsteadily toward the door. Caution was very necessary; for if a husband had been expressing himself with fist or stick or poker, the last implements might still be in his hand, and Padgett did not like blows. But there was dead silence within, save as the long moan came at intervals; and old Padgett opened the door and looked in, stealing nearer and nearer the bed as no occupant appeared. A woman lay there, face downward, her hands clenched in the pillow, over which her long black hair fell in a cloud.

"It's dhrunk she is, an' in a new way," said old Padgett, to whom most ways were familiar; and after some consideration he tried, with his shaking hands, to turn her over, accomplishing it at last, and staggering back against the wall. The great black eyes were open, but held no gleam of consciousness, and the face was ghastly white.

"Howly Moses! but it's Lee's woman!" old Padgett cried. "Holloa! there, you widdy Maguire over the way! Will ye see one o' your own six a-dyin' before your eyes an' niver lift a finger to stay her? Come on in here, an' tell us what's up, if ye're knowing to it."

The widdy Maguire answered the summons with such speed as her size would admit, wheezing as she came, and redolent of whiskey, but with faculties alert enough to suggest some course of action.

"Oh, wurra!" she said, as she looked at the pitiful figure; "an it's to this she's come! 'T is n't liquor at all, an' who'd ought to be knowin' that better'n you? It's that her man's gone off with another woman, an' she well-nigh ready for her throuble, too. I heard the n'ise of her, an' it made me blood run cold; but I was that heavy with the hate that I could n't tell right if I was aslape or awake, an' thought maybe 't was a bad drame. It's to the hospital she 'll have

to go. They was sayin' downstairs yesterday, that, for all they thought it, she niver knew she was n't married to him till last week. He told her it was a joke, an' the man that did it not a justice at all, at all, bad 'cess to their Protestant ways, an' niver the blessing o' the church on wan o' 'em! He said to her she was one o' that sort, anyhow; an' she fell on the floor, an' he walked away cool an' easy. You 'd think he 'd 'a' lift her the bits o' things, but up he comes with a cart an' cleans 'em all out. 'She 's a place to go,' he says; an' she sat there an' never opened her mouth. That 's what Mike Finnigan, that took 'em, said; an' he said he 'd a mind as ever was to knock Lee out o' the windy an' send his things after him. You have an ear to her now, while I go to the station an' tell 'em to come wid an ambylance for a dyin' woman that wants a spot to go aisy in."

Old Padgett followed her as she rolled toward the stairs. He had meant to stay sober, but an emergency like this demanded a little more liquor. How should it be had? He searched his empty pockets; looked through the shelves of his pantry for a possible cup or pan to be pawned, and, observing at last that the boarder still had a vest rolled up and doing duty as a pillow, cheerfully abstracted it, arranged a brick as the most satisfactory substitute, and proceeded downstairs and over the way. The transaction was a speedy one, and the result a quart of whiskey in a borrowed bottle, which old Padgett hugged affectionately on his way up the stairs, and nearly dropped in consternation as he saw the bed empty. Short as his absence had been, its occupant had understood something of the plans made for her, and, gathering all her forces with a mighty effort, slipped softly down the stairs and up the alley to the narrow street on which it opened.

"It's all the same as the dead a-risin' up with his own coffin," the indignant widdy Maguire, after a fruitless search, remarked to the sceptical policeman, who suspected the whole thing to be a hoax, devised for some unexplained and malicious purpose. "It's to the river she's gone, most likely, an' ye may look there for her, an' I'll take it kindly if ye'll dispose of yerself in the same way, though it's hard it'll be on the innercent fishes that I've no call to wish that bad luck to!" and the widdy Maguire banged the door triumphantly, and consoled herself with a cup of tea made satisfactory by a dash of "the crater."

. . . . . .

Two years in Meg's life! The one joyful, unthinking, full of new and wonderful knowledge, making all the years before tame and colorless; the other, a slow awakening to the real life, that henceforth could hold only hatred, and a long waiting for some chance to be even with this smiling, lying wretch, who did not beat her, or even swear at her, but who went his own way, and who, at the last, when she claimed her rights and swore she would murder the girl who stole them from her, laughed in her face.

"You thought you were married!" he said. "That's a good one! Ask Haggerty who the justice was. I'll tell you myself, if you like. It was Bob Sims, the tally-keeper round at Haggerty's. He knew the lingo, but he did n't suppose you was such a fool as not to catch on after a week or two. You 're good-lookin' yet, Meg, though you've spent some of it takin' on. Sims is ready to take a shine to you if you give him half a chance. I'll give him a hint myself, an' you an' me'll stay good friends, even if blue eyes does wear better 'n black. What! You ain't going to topple over that way!"

Meg had listened without a word, her face growing white and more set as he spoke, till, as the last

words came, she slid to the floor and lay there in merciful unconsciousness. Gid tried to lift her, then laid her back and turned away.

"That's the way they all do," he said, "an' I'm well out of it. She'll be all right when she gets over this, an' I've no care to bother any longer. I've had trouble enough with her goings on." And, with a final look of mingled dislike and apprehension, he walked away.

Was it Meg who lay there so silent, and who, still silent, by and by opened her great eyes, and raised herself, and crawled to the bed, — the merciful bed that held her without repulse and let her moaning sink in the pillow? Meg, who held her head high, and who thought all trouble had ended as she stole away in the gray dawning two years before, with sure faith that good times, always elusive before, were certain forevermore? Only two years, and the years that had gone before counted as nothing to her! But we must know them to know Meg. Back, then, to Byington wood and the winding road down which so little while ago she walked with her swift, free step, singing as she went. The village was far behind. A soft wind blew from the hay-fields, and she heard the ring of scythes in the meadow along the brook. She had taken off the close Shaker sun-bonnet that she hated, and her crown of black braids glistened in the sun, while her full, clear voice poured out one of the songs Ben had learned in his last pilgrimage to that region where songs and fiddles and all good things were to be found, — the great unknown city.

"When I lived in Tennessee,
I went courting Rosa Lee,"

she sang, and laughed as at a certain turn in the road the echo answered, "Lee, Lee!"

"You 're a wise one," she said. "Who told you his name was Lee? I ain't goin' to have it hollered for Ben to hear."

Something had happened. Meg's black eyes were soft and bright; the red lips, that were apt to set in a look of hard determination, smiled happily. Poor, pretty Meg! Certain that living for the rest of all time to come would mean not only fine clothes and plenty of ribbons, — perhaps even a watch and chain, — but something that had never been hers before! An arm had been around her waist, and the lips that said, "You 're a reg'lar stunner, an' no mistake, Meg! Wait till I get you dressed up!" had kissed her, and then kissed her again, with something so like love that Meg's heart swelled, and, to her own surprise, tears came to her eyes.

"You don't mean it. You 're only a-foolin'," she had said.

"I ain't, by a long shot. You 're the best-lookin' gal, — yes, you 're the tip-top han'somest gal I 've set eyes on anywheres. You come with me, Meg, an' we 'll make things stan' round. There ain't a feller in the Fourth Ward won't be after you, an' I 'll lick 'em all before I 'll let 'em come nigh you."

This was devotion. Blows had been plenty, but on her, not for her. Gid Lee was not much to look at, — in fact, she was a good half-inch taller; but he had a waxed mustache, and smelled of bergamot, and sparkled with cheap pins and chains. His clothes, too, were of an order of elegance heretofore unknown, and his light wandering eyes were bright with what to Meg was very clearly love. Then he knew so many things! How could a creature so gifted look at her with any satisfaction, or be content to take her just as she was? It was delightful, also, to have a secret, and to steal to the alder thicket and wait, and fancy herself one of the beautiful maidens

in the story-papers that Ben sometimes brought home. How could it be that she should be chosen out of the crowd of girls, every one of them dying for him, her lover declared?

She would marry him very soon, and begin the life she had waited for. Meg Lee!—never any more Meg Duke, who even now did not escape blows, and who hated them all except Bram. Bram had never struck her; and though he never told her that he was glad she stood up for him, it was plain enough in his eyes. Meg loved fair play, and she had always tried to make the best of things, though she swore like the rest, when the best would not discover itself. Perhaps in time she would be somebody, when she had left behind her a place where everybody knew her and pointed at her. Then she fell to wondering again why Gid had come up here, and why his father had not suspected him.

Old Gideon Lee was a farmer, a deacon in the Baptist church, as hard-headed and as hard-hearted as the stones in his long lines of wall. The boy had hated the farm, and hated his father's iron rule; and his timid and deprecating little mother watched the contests between them with helpless terror. Love had had little share in his birth or training; and the stinted, grasping nature had only a trace of affection for mother, and none whatever for home. Naturally, the small Gideon ran away, and, as naturally, to that Mecca toward which the eyes of boys turn from thousands of farms. He had gone through endless phases in his twelve years of life in New York,—a voyage or two, a season as newsboy, a promotion as messenger-boy, and an arrest for robbing a money-letter intrusted to him. Up to this point there had been no positive wrong; but in the prison from which there was no one to save him he had taken lessons in more skilful work, and left it prepared for a career

in any form of crime that might seem desirable. At present he was barkeeper of a saloon in the Fourth Ward, — Barney Sullivan's "Champion's Rest," from which he had found it convenient to be absent for a time till the proprietor had settled to his own satisfaction whether the receipts had been kept back or not. A sudden impulse had come upon him to go home, and show how well he had prospered without them, and the meeting with Meg the day after his arrival had given an unexpected zest to the monotony.

Old Gideon Lee looked with profound distrust on this son, whose hands were white, and whose manner, easy and assured, indicated an experience the father would not even imagine. He doubted sometimes if it were his son; for not a trace of the pale, freckled, sulky boy of twelve remained, and he sought in vain his motive for lingering on, when, if he told the truth, he was needed every hour in the business to which he gave no name, but in which he had evidently prospered. There was no clew to its nature, and even Meg knew as little as the rest how he really lived.

The lingering was over. That afternoon, in the alder thicket on the old mail-road to Weathersfield, he had settled it all with Meg. There had been a hint that she could come to him without ceremony; but Meg flamed up on the moment, and he had hastened to say that he knew a justice that would marry them the moment they reached New York, and she smiled again. Amanda, an older sister, who now and then appeared to them, had never been married; and the various children had as various fathers. Meg knew all about that, and was not surprised; but she meant to have things different for herself. Gid should never be sorry he had married her. If Meg had known what a prayer was, she would even have prayed as she sped along the wood-road, her heart

light, and a tenderness for every familiar thing rising up, and making her laugh out with pure pleasure. Only two days more in the gloomy little house, free just now from the rank smell of granny's ever-burning pipe. Not that Meg minded the pipe in itself, save that everything about granny was unpleasant. There were minutes when Meg admired her father, but granny was simply a swearing, drinking, terrible old woman, who nipped and pinched and struck, and looked at them all with an evil eye. She had been gone two months on one of her periodical expeditions. What she did in them nobody knew, and granny only chuckled and hugged herself with her lean arms when asked. She was an outlaw, like the rest, and had her seasons of revolt against even such routine as Meg had brought about in her daily life.

Meg paused for a breath, and sat down on a log, from which she could see the house; and as she sat, her mind went back over the years that had passed since Margaret slipped the little ring on her finger. Her father had broken up the Edgeton quarters as suddenly as he broke up, when the mood seized him, any den they might be living in; packed the few household goods and the family into the shaky wagon drawn by a horse whose means of subsistence were known only to himself, but who made whatever effort was demanded of him without collapsing into the heap of bones which was the result naturally to be expected. They had lived for a year on the edge of the swamp, levying toll on every farm about. Meg had crept under barns and laid in wait for chickens, and stolen into gardens at midnight for the first ears of green corn or a foray on melon-beds. Duke never begged. The world owed him a living, and he took it where he could find it. In some unknown period in his life he had learned a trade as shoemaker and cobbler, and now and then suddenly resigned his

trapping and fishing, gathered up the dilapidated boots and shoes of the neighborhood so far as people were willing to trust them to him, and settled doggedly to work. He was not pleasant company at these times. The confinement did not agree with him. He swore at the family, individually and collectively, and kept a strap at hand with which to hasten Meg's movements. He even threatened sometimes to send her to school, and as a prelude chalked letters on the side of leather kept for these intervals of labor, and forced her to say them over, as she faced him defiantly.

"You 've got to read an' write an' cipher a bit, else folks 'll get ahead of you," he said; "so you may just put your mind to it, whether you like it or not."

Meg hated it till she discovered that she could spell out some of the words in a picture-paper Ben had brought home, and from that time never rested till a printed page was easy to her, and she could read to Bram when granny did not interfere. Bram seldom spoke. It was not certain that he was quite in his right mind. When he did speak, it was generally in a volley of oaths at some infringement of his rights.

Duke never swore back, which Meg thought very curious; and when Bram fixed his unwinking black eyes on an offender, and poured out a stream of profanity at which Ben chuckled with delight, Duke simply listened, with a nod now and then, as if assenting to it all. Nor did he say a word when Bram finally rolled over exhausted, and granny, who had only turned her cunning old eyes toward them occasionally, relighted her pipe, which in the excitement had gone out, and went on smoking. Sometimes, when her tongue had been loosened by a double mug of hard cider, she talked to Meg, who

questioned her when alone; and it was in one of these talks that she had discovered the reason of Bram's immunity.

"Nick could wring his neck twice in a minute, an' Bram knows it," she said; "but Nick kinder seems to hold on to rememberin' how it was through him that Bram got run over an' smashed out o' all shape. Nick was consid'able drunk that day, an' drivin' an ox-team for a man that was hayin'; and Bram was n't but three, and straight 's an arrer. Nick had a kind o' soft spot for him, for he was the first boy; an' he lifts him up an' puts him on the tongue o' the team. Peg hollered."

"Who was Peg?" Meg interrupted.

"Your mam. It 's about time you asked if you ever had one. Her hollerin' did n't do no good. The oxen give a start, an' on they goes, an' under the fore-wheels went Bram. Peg screeched, an' Bram screeched; an' Nick stopped short with that wheel right acrost him. Then Peg give another screech an' run out; an' with that Nick started on ag'in, an' the hind wheel went over him. Peg picked him up an' took him in, jest a-hangin' limp, an' Nick groaned an' took on pretty nigh as bad. His legs was broke, an' his ribs was broke, an' he was mashed all over; an' he hain't never been right sence then. They did n't suppose but what he 'd die any minute, an' so they did n't do much for him but set his legs; but he lived, an' all in a twist from his everlastin' rollin' round after he came to any. It would 'a' been enough sight better if he had n't: always a-starin' an' eyin' you, when he ain't cussin' or plannin' some deviltry. Nick don't seem to lay it up. He 's got the best disposition of any of 'em."

Who "any of 'em" were Meg understood but vaguely. Strange men came and went at intervals, and once Amanda had come with a baby that

screamed day and night, until granny gave it paregoric. For the most part, her small world held but three figures, who beat her when they were drunk and threatened to beat her when sober; and from whom she escaped whenever she could, on private forays of her own. So long as berries were ripe, life was very simple; and she could spend days in the woods, with no occasion for home till night came, and she crawled to the straw pallet in the loft, and lost all troubles in dreamless sleep. Meg shared her father's opinion that the world owed them a living; and her sharp ear took in every hint of how it was to be paid, dropped by him in casual talks over his pipe. She knew that they were outlaws, but it had never troubled her but once. That was the moment when the child just her own age, and who never seemed to think of any difference between them, had said to her, "I don't suppose I ever shall run away again, and so I sha'n't see you; but I won't ever forget you, Meg."

She had cried then; for she felt suddenly lonesome, and wanted she hardly knew what. She cried again as she lay on her hard little bed that night, and felt the ring on her finger, and saw the stars through the hole in the roof. Everything she wanted was just as far off as they; and when morning broke, and she found that the wagon stood before the door, and that she was to be taken away from this one hint of something better, she screamed and kicked till Duke cuffed her into silence, and threw her into the wagon on a feather-bed. That was long ago; but she had never forgotten Margaret, nor the strange story she had told. The prince came to the desert island, and he married Miranda. Of course her chances would be better if she were on an island, but he would come some day, anyway.

Meg grew from a lank and wild-eyed child into a tall girl, who came to have pride in her long black hair,

braided and coiled about her head, and who knew that her cheeks were red, and that her great eyes had a look in them that even Ben admired. Granny eyed her reflectively. Meg was going to make a fine figure of a woman, and something might come of it. Meg hated liquor, smell and taste being alike offensive to her, and never joined them in the wild orgies that lasted sometimes for days; in which Duke brought home a keg of whiskey or rum, and all drank till it was empty. Duke danced and sang then, and Meg preferred this state to his usual one of half-sulky defiance of everything. Now and then Ben brought home a comrade; sometimes well dressed, and wearing cheap jewelry that made Meg's heart beat with desire for the same magnificence. Once an escaped prisoner had harbored there; but for the most part they lived alone. In England their status would have been plain. Duke would have been entered under the head "poacher," and dealt with accordingly when opportunity came. New England had no laws that exactly fitted such a case. They passed from town to town, leaving shreds of evil reputation in each which, when investigated, seldom seemed susceptible of proof. The drinking was a plain, above-board fact; the thieving known, yet impossible to prove. And Duke, when sober and disposed to work, could make himself so valuable that the most suspicious farmer yielded to the spell, and rejoiced in a man who could do two days' work in one. Meg had inherited this faculty. She swore and lied and stole with a facility born of long and steady practice; but this tumble-down house on the edge of the Weathersfield woods, where Duke had been content to remain a longer period than ever before, she kept in better order than had ever been their portion till she took the reins. She watched, too, over Bram, — a target for blows and kicks from Ben, who waxed

surlier and more brutal with every month. The stray ministers who at various intervals in their wandering life had come under the unhallowed roofs that sheltered them, fled appalled before the stream of oaths that issued from both brothers at the first word of warning or remonstrance; and Meg had danced with delight at some of the encounters. She was content enough, save for the vague stir of remembrance at times, or a sudden longing for the change that must be on the way. But Meg had few thoughts. We are apt to believe that the same eager questioning and perplexity haunts the minds of all, and that workman and pauper and criminal alike are torn by conflict, and wrestle from day to day with the problem of existence. On the contrary, nothing is more certain than that there is small wonder, less question, and a blank acceptance of what the hour may bring for that vast army making up the lower classes.

For Ben and his kind, sullen discontent was the ordinary state; but Ben's discontent came because he was the unlucky one and had tested the quality of prison food in half a dozen States, — the fact that he had become an admirable carpenter hardly being an offset, to his mind, for the method of tuition. Duke's philosophy was, on the whole, optimistic. When just drunk enough, life held all that he wanted, and he chuckled over his own methods of getting even with the world with unfailing satisfaction.

Lately Meg's sense of being cut off from the world at large had suddenly deepened. She was sixteen now, and seemed twenty. She had never been hungry or cold save from her own choice, having that advantage over the city Arab; and her superbly lithe yet rounded figure held the strength and the beauty of the wild woods she loved, not for their beauty, or for anything save that they gave her

food and freedom, and the interest consequent on the pursuit of both. People looked at her now as she came and went from the village. It was not often, for Duke brought home what was needed; but she liked to turn over the gay prints in the store at the cross-roads; and there, as Gid lounged from place to place for amusement, he had seen her, and, thrilled with sudden admiration, followed her part way home. The conquest was just difficult enough to be stimulating. Meg had repulsed him angrily; then regarded him distrustfully, but with secret admiration; and yielded, after a day or two, to the charm of a manner which took it for granted she needed a friend, and promised accordingly. And now he was much more than friend. He had given her money for her fare, and settled where they were to meet; and now what could be done with the unbearably long two nights and a day between her and the new life? The prince had come! and poor Meg sprang up and half danced as she went on to the house. Bram lay on the floor before the smouldering fire as she opened the door. That it was August made no difference; he was always cold. He looked fixedly at Meg as she came in. Something was going on, he felt, and watched her as she moved about, boiling the mush for supper and frying some pork in a long-handled frying-pan. Meg felt his scrutiny, and after supper was eaten, climbed to her loft to escape it. With daybreak came a swift determination to give that day to a last look at some of her old haunts. There was an orchard a mile or two this side of Byington, where harvest apples grew, and there must be a basketful of late blackberries in an upland pasture near it. At any rate, these should be her excuse if Bram asked any questions; but he did not, and by sunrise she was on her way. If Meg had known that the same impulse had come to Margaret,

whose nearness she had never dreamed, and that, on separate ways still, the upper road divided from the wood-road only by a mass of undergrowth, they had passed at noon, — Meg walking lightly as she dreamed of the morrow, and Margaret with dreams also of something better to come some day!

Meg found her berries and filled her basket, ate her fill of apples and secured as many about her as could be carried, and, late in the afternoon, as she lingered along the road, came suddenly upon Ben and Bram on their way from the farm where Duke was haying. Ben was more amiable than usual, and told stories as they went, finally sitting down to eat some of the apples; while Meg went on to the spring in the rock, and, making a cup of oak-leaves, held it up to catch the tiny stream as it fell. She did not turn at the sound of wheels until they stopped near her, but her recognition was as instantaneous as Margaret's. What held her back she could not have told. Something in Miss Lyman's serious, inquiring face repelled and silenced her. She was glad not to be forgotten; but what had she to do with people that rode in carriages and looked at her like that? She broke through the bushes and fled, bursting suddenly into crying as she stopped to wonder why she had not answered Margaret's call. She had dried her tears when Ben and Bram came up with her, but she cried again when, in the early evening, granny hobbled in, stiff and half dead with exhaustion, but shaking the rope triumphantly. Once more Margaret had helped even more than she knew. Granny took it very much as a matter of course; but Duke glowed with admiration as he listened.

"She 's the same sort yet," he said; "I tell you, Meg, it 's a pity there ain't more of her kind."

Meg nodded silently.

"It was her, most likely, in that kerridge," Bram

said, with unwonted interest. "If she 'd 'a' known Meg, most likely she 'd 'a' spoke to her."

"You 're makin' a great to-do about nothin'," Ben said surlily. "They was darn stuck-up pieces, anyway; an' I 'd like to make 'em go shares with the poor folks they live on. We 're good as they."

"They 're up an' we 're down, — that 's all the difference," Duke said; "but for all that she ain't a bad kind."

Meg crept up to her loft. She was tired, but she could not sleep. She lay tossing restlessly till starlight gave place to gray dawn, then stole down the ladder, and through the door, which no one ever dreamed of locking. She looked toward Bram's corner a moment, with the wish that somehow he could share the new fortunes to which she went, then sped down the path and toward the village; and in another hour the old life was behind, and the unknown nearer with every moment. Poor, pretty Meg, to whose unaccustomed eyes every sight of the bewildering city meant paradise! Gid met her; and with many a jeer at her disgracefully mean garments, took her to a store on Division Street, and purchased first a bonnet, at the magnificence of which she held her breath, and then a silk dress and a mantle of equal splendor, — that they were second-hand, making no difference in the general effect. They went before somebody whom Gid called a justice; and as the words, "I pronounce you man and wife," fell on her ears, all doubt that had lingered in her mind was dispelled once for all. He took her to rooms in a better class of tenement-house, furnished with what to Meg was luxurious elegance, — a red-rep set in the little parlor, gay chromos on the walls, and plenty of stores in the kitchen closet. And here the new life began; and Meg gave herself up to the first real happiness her dwarfed and hampered years had ever known,

amazed herself at the wild passion of affection that went out toward the husband who accepted it as fully his due, and responded for a time with a fair semblance of the same fervor.

When did the change begin? — for slowly a change showed itself. She would not believe that Gid was fickle. She did not alter; why should he? The baby was coming, to be sure; and she felt sick and miserable, and could not go about with him or dance all night, as she had done in that first year. There was less money, and they had moved farther down, — on Cherry Street, — and had two rooms instead of three. Gid came in drunk oftener than he did at first, but that troubled her but little: somebody had always been drunk at home, and men, she supposed, were made that way. But down on the floor below was a girl who sang in one of the concert saloons; blue-eyed, with an innocent face, as if she knew no evil. Gid had gone for her sometimes. There was no harm in that; but now he lingered there, and two or three times they had gone on excursions together.

"You 'd better look out for your man," old Padgett had said, one morning, as she crept down for a breath of air. It was August again, and the heat lay heavily over the city, shimmered in the narrow streets, and steamed up from pavement and wall. Meg loathed the smells all about her. She had not cared in those first months, when everything was fun. She crept back presently, and sat down by the window. Gid was in the saloon below them, she knew, and would come up soon for some breakfast. Meg moved about slowly, and with a longing for the woods that till now she had renounced willingly. Gid was making money again, and why could they not go off somewhere for a little while? She would ask him; and she turned gladly as the door opened and Gid came in whistling. It was a tune they had

played in the concert saloon last night, as she sat alone and heard the girl's voice, high and piercing, ring out the words that brought bursts of drunken laughter and the stamping of heavy feet. What she said she did not know. She hated the tune, and in another moment she hated him; for the whole long lie had been made plain.

It might have been a day or a year when once more she began to understand. Time had gone on, she knew, as she lay there, sometimes with long, low cries and shuddering moans, sometimes silent, and falling farther and deeper down into darkness. There were thrills and stirs of life that maddened her. His child! Never, never hers. She hated it, as she hated the false father whose face it would have. She would kill it if it ever saw the light, but it would not. This darkness was death; and death was good if it ended life, for this life she longed to crush out and annihilate. Then the voices came. At first they meant nothing. Then she knew that something would be done, and as she gathered her forces once more, remembered that there was a little money in her purse, and that she could get away if only they left her long enough.

Through her half-closed lids she watched old Padgett, and as he stumbled down the stairs, followed swiftly and silently, making her way toward the nearest ferry. She had caught up her hat and a shawl, and pulled it about her as she went; but her strength had gone. She staggered on, catching at railings, and desperately bent on accomplishing her purpose. A policeman was following her, and two or three boys, who watched her uncertain movements. She darted across under horses' heads, the startled drivers swearing fiercely as they reined up; reached the ferry-house; but as she felt for her purse, fell in the narrow way, and lay there till the men had lifted her

and, with a shake of the head, carried her into the waiting-room.

"Hospital ain't much use," they said, as the ambulance presently appeared, and they lifted her in. "She 's done for, anyway. Han'some, whoever she is; but a hard case, most likely. That 's what they come to. It 's a queer world."

"Lord help her, whatever she is!" the old ferry-master said, pausing a moment in his work to look after the ambulance; and if the prayer could not prevail for Meg, it at least helped the offerer.

. . . . . .

Once more Meg came to herself, groping out faintly from the long darkness. Her hands were heavy, and fell back as she tried to raise them; her head was strangely light. Her eyelids lifted slowly, and she tried to look about. She remembered a little now. Had she died, and was she alive again in some strange, new world? — not heaven, surely, this shadowy place with white walls shutting her in; nor yet that other. A screen stood near her, and with an effort she moved it slightly and saw another bed beyond her, and a figure standing by it, that hastened toward her.

"That is good," a voice said. "You 've come to yourself at last."

Meg's eyes searched the face, the heavy yet kindly one of a middle-aged woman.

"You want to know about it?" the voice went on. "They all do. The baby 's alive, an' as fine a child as you 'd like to see. There 's a woman over there nursing it with her own till you come to. You 've been awful bad with brain fever, but the doctor pulled you through."

Meg made no response, but her brain was working again swiftly. This was a hospital. She was going to get well. Since the baby had not died, there was

something still that she must do. She had lived, and it must be for this. She took what the nurse brought, and soon slept again, waking with a sense of dawning life that, if she had not remembered, would have made her seem a girl again. The doctor stood looking at her, and smiled as her eyes fixed themselves on him; a tall man, with a mane of waving, red-brown hair.

"You 'll do nicely," he said with a nod. "Now, mind the nurse, and you 'll soon be well."

In a day or two Meg sat up, and they brought her the baby; six weeks old, and with great black eyes like her own. Meg wished they had been light and wandering, like the eyes she hated. This tiny face was her own in miniature; and as the warm, aimless little fingers closed on hers, she felt a stir of longing to have it really hers. But her mind was fixed. She would take such care of it as she must till well enough to be discharged, and then she knew what to do. She was going back to the country, she told both doctor and nurse; and the doctor, who at each visit lingered near her with a desire to help in some way, wondered more and more if it were quite right to let her go with no more strenuous effort to find out her real history. He gave her his card at the last.

"If you are in trouble I shall be glad to help you," he said, and shook hands with her, looking still for some response from the beautiful face to which health was coming back. The hair, shorn in the fever, was growing now, and lay in thick, glossy rings on her head. Youth was strong, and the rich coloring lost for a time was returning. Meg had been a handsome girl, with a bold, bright face. Now she was a woman, with deep, sorrowful eyes looking from under eyebrows and thick lashes dark and soft as velvet. The boldness and brightness were gone, but fixed resolution lent dignity and power; and again the doctor

wondered as he looked and lingered for a moment, hoping for a word from those silent and inscrutable lips. Meg turned her head, and he went away disappointed.

One more night at the hospital, and with morning Meg took the baby, neatly dressed through the care of a sympathetic visitor, and with only a nod accepted her discharge, and left the aggrieved and puzzled nurse to look after her discontentedly. She made her way slowly to Stuyvesant Square, and sat down on one of the benches. It was mid-October now, but bright and sunny; and the sweet air and sunshine were a breath from the past she had put away. She had some milk for the baby, and fed it when it cried. It must be kept quiet and comfortable, so that it would make no sound by and by when they came to the place of which she thought. She remembered it well; for the boat had landed near there one of the last times she had gone anywhere with Gid, and he had said, as they looked at the strange piles of second-hand material for building, what a place it would be to hide if the cops were after one! It had been warm when she entered the square, and she had sat there looking with unseeing eyes at the children as they played. Once or twice she had noticed the bowed head of a man on a bench beyond. "Getting over a drunk," she said to herself, and looked away from him. He had roused after a time, and sat up, showing a flushed face and troubled blue eyes; and now he fixed them on Meg, who again sat looking straight before her. He was waiting, too; but as he looked a sense of coming tragedy was upon him, and he watched, certain that he must be needed.

Sunset was near at last. Meg rose, and slowly made her way across the city. There were gates, perhaps, that would close, and she must hide herself there before the darkness settled down. The baby

slept in her warm, strong arms. Once it had opened its eyes and smiled at her, but Meg had no answering smile. Till to-day she had not included herself in her plan, but now the same resolution was for both. Why should she live any longer? To be even with Gid would be good, but she saw no way; and if she lived, something even worse might happen to her. She stole down between the piles of lumber, and seated herself in a little space at the end, waiting for darkness. Once or twice it seemed to her that something stirred not far away, and she listened breathlessly till sure it was her fancy alone. The stars came out one by one, and a young moon sank slowly in the west. The wind blew chill from the river. Meg shivered and drew her shawl around her, then rose suddenly. What did it matter? She would be colder presently. She laid the baby against her breast, and bound the shawl tightly about her, tying it firmly at the back; then, with one look up to the sky, climbed to the pile of boards, and, running to the end, leaped far into the black water. Behind her came a flying figure.

"Ach, Gott! that I slept!" it cried, and, with a leap as strong, followed, and was lost in the whirling eddy where Meg had gone down.

IV.

MEG had sunk twice. Lights danced before her eyes, and great spaces seemed to open out. She saw the swamp again, and the child Margaret coming toward her, and beyond her many faces, — her father's and Bram's, and others she did not know. They held out their hands to her. She did not struggle. It was all quiet and content, nor did the baby even move. Then, as she rose again, something seized her.

"Let me alone!" she tried to cry, and fought away from the hands that held.

"I'll knock your head off if you do that way!" a half-strangled voice said; and, strangely enough, Meg, who was drowning willingly, shrank from the thought of blows, and ceased struggling. Gid had taught her to swim at Rockaway; and now she even tried to strike out, and felt her arms held by the shawl.

"Hold me — so, and we shall get to the pier," the voice said. "Ha! You can schwim? Then that is good. Now I steady you. Stop! I kill you if you let go! Now!"

A few strokes, — laboring and panting ones; for though Meg involuntarily tried to keep herself afloat, the current was strong and the tide setting out. But even in the darkness they had touched the pier at the end where rough steps led down. Meg crawled up, still impelled by these mysterious hands, and lay on the pier gasping and half dead, while a streaming figure fell beside her, groaning and swearing strange oaths.

"It is water of the devil's own pouring out," it said; "so thick as mud, and of all tastes. So! You make me swallow more, do you?" for Meg had sat up and made a movement as if to throw herself once more. "Again I tell you, I break your head if you be not all quiet. Wait till I can think well and know what to do. Now, first der baby. Is it drowned?"

"Yes," Meg said. "It is here in my shawl — dead."

He shook himself and wrung the water from his hair, then untied the shawl and rolled the baby on his knees till the water poured from its mouth and it gave a faint moan. Meg did not stir. It was alive, and all her pain counted for nothing. Well, then, it might live if it could. She had done her part, and there was nothing left to do. She wondered who this was who had brought her back, and why he had not let her drown. Then her teeth chattered, and he ceased his work with the baby and rose.

"See now!" he said. "I know all the way out, and it is not far from the shop I run from in the morning, thinking not much to return to it again. Come now, always in the shadow that no one see, and soon you shall be warm and dry."

Meg followed him mechanically. Fate had taken matters out of her hands, and nothing remained, but obedience. What opinions the policeman might have formed, had one appeared to note the mysterious figures dripping with water, and stealing into the shadow of alley-ways as the street lamps brought them into sudden prominence, who can tell? An emergency is generally a guarantee of their absence. It proved so now; and in time a little shop on Ninth Avenue was reached, the man feeling anxiously in his pockets, and nodding with satisfaction as he took out a key.

"Goot! So much the water has spared," he said. "Now, I haf no clothes for women, but only a *schlaf-rock* as you sleep. I make a little fire to dry all and boil coffee, and you make straight into the bed and der baby. We hang all to dry, and you sleep, and I sleep, and der baby, and who shall know? But if you try to get away, then I kill you quick. You hear?"

Meg made no answer as he gathered up some shavings from the floor, and proceeded to kindle a fire in a small stove and put on water to boil. Then he went into an inner room, and presently returned in dry clothing, and hung the wet on a line back of the stove.

"There is room for yours too. Now it is time for you," he said, stripping the clothing from the baby and rolling it in a blanket he had brought out. "I trust you with it, when you are in bed," he went on. "Go now, so quick as can be, or you know what I do!"

He spoke with a fierceness that, whether real or assumed, was all that could move Meg at present; and she obeyed, even to putting on the long *schlaf-rock* and rolling herself in the blankets. Soon he appeared, the baby on his arm and a cup of coffee in his hand.

"I give it warm drink," he said, "and it will sleep. Now it is for you to drink."

The blood moved in her veins once more as she drank. She took the baby in her arms. Its lips were blue, but it gave no other sign of what it had suffered. Meg looked at it with a new feeling. It had been Gid's, and she had done right to put it from her. But now, since death would not have it, it was hers. She would care for it, and if any comfort were to be had in such possession, take it. She gathered it to her breast with a gesture that did

not escape this singular being who apparently had the direction of her life, and who nodded his satisfaction.

"Goot!" he said once more. "Now, sleep and forget it all." And he closed the door, noiselessly barricading it in such fashion that any movement would precipitate tin pans and scuttle and poker, in an alarm loud enough to rouse a neighborhood.

"Now, I too shall sleep well," he said, gathering the loose shavings in a pile in one corner, and rolling his coat into a pillow; and soon the measured breathing made his words good.

When Meg waked, her clothing was by her on a chair, and the baby's with it, dry and ready for wear. She felt weak and tired, yet somehow new hope had come to her. How she was to live she could not tell. She could get work perhaps, and anyway something could be done. She dressed slowly, finding that water and towels were there. Everything in the room indicated poverty, yet all was clean, and there were certain things that to Meg seemed luxuries. She dressed the baby, who now showed few signs of what it had gone through, and who smiled as she took it and looked eagerly in its face, rejoicing that not a trace of the father could be seen. There was a savory smell in the air, — bacon frying and coffee boiling; and soon she opened the door, and, with the baby on her arm, stood there, her cheeks burning with shame, yet anxious to have the first words over. Fierceness had fled. The stranger evidently kept it for emergencies, for he smiled as he looked up and motioned Meg to a chair.

"Eat now," he said, "and soon we will talk and settle things. The baby, it shall lie in my place. Who knows but the smell of the shavings may strike in, — for so it was to me, — and it become, in good time, a carver, it may be."

He filled Meg's cup as he spoke, and talked, while they ate, as if such visitors were daily events. Meg fed the baby, and laid it back on the shavings, over which he had spread her shawl, and watched him as he moved about quickly and handily as a woman. She remembered his face now; but he was not young, as she had thought. The blue eyes were boyish and gentle, and his fair hair and close blond beard gave him a look of youth which the lines of the face denied. He was certainly forty, — to Meg the same as if he had been eighty; and he was unlike any one she had ever seen. Not a gentleman, — that could not be, of course; yet there was something in his look and manner, the way he ate and drank, very different from anything she had ever known. Shavings and tools were scattered about, but books lay among them too, and on the wall was a small rack filled to overflowing with other books. A sword hung above it, and a branch of what Meg knew afterward to be olive crossed it, and was fastened to the wall. In the outer shop there were various pieces of broken furniture; but here, where she sat, were panels ready for carving, and one on which a cluster of grape leaves was partly completed, while on a table were drawing materials and an open portfolio of designs. Meg looked at everything wonderingly till he had arranged matters to his own fancy and sat down before her. Her own look did not falter as she met his serious eyes; and as he said, "Now the time is here, — you shall tell me what you will," the silence that had held her seemed broken, and she poured out all her life. Rude speech; small power to tell the thoughts that had slowly smouldered and consumed her. She hesitated sometimes, then went on, always with her eyes fixed on his, till all had been told, and she sat silent, her cheeks burning, and a stronger and stronger hope in her heart. The old Meg was dead.

A new life, a new Meg, might go and come from henceforth here if he would have it so. She watched him pacing up and down the narrow limits, and looked at him eagerly.

"So!" he said, at last, again facing her, and with a gentle kindness in his eyes. "What the sea gives is our own. Now, in turn, you shall know. I have much courage; I have need of much, for many times I must suffer — for others, it may be, or for myself. But always it is to bear much. I am workman now. I choose it so. I am with the people. But there are days I am not one of them, only feel and feel, and seek, as I may, ways that shall help them. That is at home in my own Germany. I study much, and always that I may help; and there are many of us that do the same. That you will not understand if I tell you, but this you can know, — for the people, my brothers, always for the people, I work. I have been in prison long. I have lost my own; there is left nothing of anything that was mine. Then at last I am free, — a new caprice that tells us we are feared no longer; and I come here to this America, — a land that one calls free, but where, too, there is bitter, bitter slavery. I can work; I know many ways. But none care, in truth. Always it is for themselves, not for the world. I write and I speak, and I am with them day by day. They will not learn. Always they cry for money, more money, — never for wisdom. So yesterday I have talked much to some that call themselves leaders. I tell them that they work all wrong, — that they know not the heart of anything, but give and take but husks; and they laugh, and tell me I am too much dreamer. I say that may be. I have no more heart, and wander over anywhere, and at last am in the square. There I sit, — my head all down; and if any think me mad or drunk, I care not. It even seems to me that to

end all may be good. But at last you are there. I see eyes that have a world's trouble in them. It may be but your own, but there is other to come. You see nothing, not even the baby; and I watch you. I know the signs. And when you creep away still, and the look more there, I follow; for I know there is some one who suffers more than I. So, child, that is all, and here you are come. There is no place that is yours; then shall this be yours if you will. Alone, the two; no one thinks to me, no one to you. What the sea gives I take. Shall it be so?"

Meg shrunk a little. She had listened intently, but much that he had said had no meaning. He had suffered, and he was sorry for everybody, and wanted to help, and he seemed to think that she did. She wanted to stay. He was good, and would neither beat her nor curse her, and he would care for the baby, too, perhaps, and everything would be better.

"I bind you not at all," he said, as he watched her. "If in time you choose to go, you shall go at will. But now your rest is here, and I shall teach you things you never do know. That face has a soul behind it. Poor, burdened one, you must have your soul for your own, and know it."

"I will work," Meg said at last, still uncertain of his real meaning. "I can work. I will do all you want — if I can — if I know how."

"That is good," he said. "Now, tell me what age you have."

"Eighteen. In December I shall be nineteen, but I do not know the day. Granny does, but she would not tell; and dad said all birthdays were bad days, and he had forgotten mine as soon as he could."

"Ah, so! Well, soon we choose our own day, and it shall be good," her new friend said, with a smile. "Now, you know not how I am called, and I shall

tell you. Berthold, — that is my own name, that no one here calls me. Say it after me, — Berthold — Berthold Lessing."

He laughed as Meg stammered the new word, and, sitting down by her, devoted some time to making her repeat it till the right accent was gained.

"Now it is right," he said at last; "and you shall work as you can, and make the little room for yourself. Here shall be mine, and to-day I shall sling the hammock, and think that once more I sail the Northern Sea. But it shall be home here, and you shall make it happy, Meg. I go now to get a something we need."

He looked back half distrustfully for a moment, then shook his head and hurried away. She would stay, and he should see the beautiful head bending over the baby when he came back. Meg had taken it up, and sat now, for a long time, wondering, yet quiet. He was different from any one she had ever heard of. She had been ready for anything, and flushed now as she saw how far his thought was from hers. She would do the best she could; and if she had a soul, as he seemed certain, why, it would be curious to find out what was in it. She broke into a little laugh, and the baby opened its eyes as if startled at the sound. When had she laughed before? Truly it was a new Meg; and Lessing, as he came in, his arms full of packages, smiled down at her, and saw that there was no more need for uncertainty.

Meg had heard footsteps overhead, and shrunk back into the little bedroom, fearing that some one might burst in, in the fashion people had been wont to do in the great tenement-house. But they soon ceased, and she lifted a corner of the curtain and peeped out cautiously. The smallest of yards was at the back; but the grass of the tiny plot in the centre was close and green, and grape-vines covered the side

of the house and climbed over the window. She opened the window softly and looked up, surprised to find that the building was of wood, and only two stories in height. She wondered if it belonged to Berthold, then laughed at herself for the thought, and went back to the middle room, which had no light save from the front. At some time it must have been a store; for the front was all window and door, and thus abundant light found its way in. It was good to be so far away from everybody that had known her in the two years that seemed now so far behind, and she resolved never to go out save after nightfall, and to avoid every familiar spot. The Fourth Ward had its own life, and knew little outside of it, and here she was as safe from detection almost as if she had died. She fell to work, when she had settled this in her own mind, with an energy that soon established order; and Lessing watched her with kind eyes, and busied himself with altering arrangements so that both could be comfortable.

"Let me sleep in the shop," Meg had said, as she saw him moving pieces of furniture, and clearing a corner where a hammock could be slung. "I can sleep anywhere, and I don't want to take your room."

"But I choose it so," he said, with kindly but very absolute decision. "Here will be comfort, too, as much as there; and you must have your own place. Then, when people come they find me here, and there is room to sit."

"Do many come?" Meg said, disturbed. "You mean folks that want things mended?"

"They come, but it is not they I mean. No; soon you will see. It is men who come to discuss many things. Upstairs there is one who is more a leader than I. He is strong, and he speaks always what he thinks. He is German, too, and a scholar; but he likes not any work, and sits all day with his

books till night comes, and brings one or another or many. All the same it is to him, so as one listens, and he pours the wonderful thoughts that he gathers in. Americans, too. It is not only Germans that think and feel. It is people that suffer everywhere. You shall know; you shall learn. All in good time it will come, and I see well that some day you will help. And now we shall make the place all good for both."

By evening a low partition divided the corner from the shop, and Meg looked with profound interest at the way in which every foot of space had been made to do service. The hammock could be unslung through the day, leaving clear working space; a little closet held the full toilet apparatus which he had brought home in the packages, and work-bench and tools were all in place.

"It is home," he said, with glee, as the last nail was driven, "and now Heilbrun may come down when he will. To-night you shall not see him, for bed is best; but soon he shall know all."

Meg found on the bed, to which she went gladly, still a little weak from the shock, a bundle of clothing, — a few plain and necessary articles, chosen as judiciously as a woman could have done, — and wondered still more where he had learned it all. She heard voices till it seemed to her far into the night, — low and measured, as if some one read; and now and then Lessing's, rising in excitement. But a day or two had passed before she saw Heilbrun, toward whom she conceived at once a violent antipathy. He was small and black and fierce. A wide mouth, and ears that stood out almost at right angles, and thick black hair that under no circumstances would consent to lie flat, added to the aggressiveness of his effect; and though his high forehead and deep-set, powerful eyes redeemed the face from vulgarity, he

looked infinitely less the student and thinker than Lessing. His arms were long, and his hands hairy, and with fingers like claws. His voice was the surprise, — low, measured, musical; speaking an English so perfect that even Meg could feel its charm. He hugged his knees, and with fixed and dreamy eyes poured out a continuous stream of words, to which Lessing listened with devotion, and seldom answered, save when a proposition had proved too flagrant. Meg did not understand him, nor did she care to. With Lessing, she absorbed his least word, turning it over in her mind, and certain it meant much, whether she could understand it or not. But with Heilbrun, who only nodded to her, and who sat sometimes considering her critically, — as if she were a tiger in a cage, Meg thought indignantly, — she felt only repulsion. He had asked no questions, and accepted her presence there as natural and quite to be expected; and now and then he took the baby in his arms and looked at him seriously and attentively, often with a word or two of German to Lessing, who only shook his head. The words that to Meg seemed almost a curse on the child meant at first but one thing.

"Send it away," he urged. "What have you to do with such as this?"

But as weeks went on, and the baby grew round and rosy, and caught at the great ears and laughed in the fierce face of the prophet, he found himself smiling back, and at last demanded the child as the regulation opening for the evening's ceremonies, which included a mug or two of lager, and a slow pipe, often dropped as talk went on. Lessing neither smoked nor drank. Coffee was his one indulgence; and Meg found that, save for her sake, heavy food of any description would never enter their quarters. He bought meat for her, but never touched it himself, fruit and bread

and grains being his choice, with now and then some vegetable. Meg wondered how he could be so strong, for she had seen him tumble a quarrelsome workman out of the shop, and she remembered yet the grip of his hands on that night when he had dragged her from the black water.

She wondered, too, what everything meant in these long Sunday-night sittings, when the little shop overflowed with strange people of all tongues and nations, with each of whom Heilbrun spoke in his own language. They were all people who had been in prison, or suffered some great wrong at the hands of the law, against which they declaimed, sometimes in low, suppressed voices, sometimes with shrieks of fury. Saturday night it was different. It was all English speech then; and though the shop was just as full, they were American or English chiefly, with a sprinkling of Germans who knew English well. Meg listened intently always. Everything was all wrong. That was the one point made plain by each, however he might state it. Wages were too low; provisions and rents too high. The rich were tyrants and oppressors; the time was coming when they would be forced to share the gains wrung from the worker. How could they hasten it? When would the day dawn?

More or less of this Meg had heard from her childhood up; but the memory of Margaret's face had stood always between any full conviction that to be rich necessarily made one bad. She was not certain, now, that Margaret was rich. If she were, she made one exception to the long list that each had to furnish of men and women who ground the face of the poor. As Meg listened, she came, by slow degrees, to share the feeling that at first had seemed no part or possibility in her life, and to feel pity for sorrows not her own. Day after day, as she moved about the little dwelling,

developing more and more the housewifely instinct, and learning from Lessing the dainty neatness that characterized his person and work, he talked or read to her, telling her the story of the poor from the beginning of time, and watching the slow growth of sympathy and understanding.

"Ah! it is growing,—the soul," he said sometimes, under his breath. "I knew it there. It will be born. She will learn as the child learns, and with the child. Ah! but these little ones can be educators if we will!"

The baby rioted in the fresh, sweet-smelling shavings; rolled in them, filled his mouth with them, and now, as a year had ended and he took uncertain and staggering steps, caught at the tools, and looked wonderingly as Lessing shook his head, with "Nein, nein; not so, baby."

A passionate, vehement little savage, he claimed all within his reach, dropping what he had secured to scramble still after the unattainable. But they waited in vain for speech. Meg spent hours in trying to make him say "mamma," and fancied that the inarticulate sound that sometimes seemed to answer her was a word. He followed them with his wonderfully clear and brilliant eyes,—knew them all, and had his own fashion of dealing with each; but his evident questions were all in pantomime. He had come to be two years old, and Lessing had insisted that some name must be given him. Meg hesitated still. He was the baby, and she dreaded any change.

"It is well that we wait, but now is it long enough," Lessing said. "A name must express something that is in me. Must I be Abraham or Moses or Cæsar, when I have never a quality of one of them? It is good to wait till the nature names itself. He is happy and certain, always. Even a passion is but a moment, and he smiles again. How it is I know not, when he has been born of grief; but law gives way

for now. I want him Felix. It has a meaning, Meg. It is 'happy;' a name of good omen. Shall it be Felix? or do you know a better?"

"I thought one day about Alexander," Meg said, after a pause. "There was a baby once at home that had that name."

"That is good; for that, too, has its meaning," Lessing said approvingly,—"'Defender of men.' The old Alexander did not live it so well, but we will make it that this one shall. Happy defender of men! to be the first, he must be the last. Meg, it is good. And the last name — how is that?"

Meg flushed a burning red. Never since that first day had she mentioned Gid's name, and she wanted no clew of that sort to the child's parentage. For herself she was simply Meg. The neighborhood knew her only as such, and seldom found opportunity to call her even that. Surrounded by Irish, they were from this very fact isolated by every circumstance. An Irishman may be socialistic in his tendencies up to a certain point, but unless he has broken loose from the traditions of his church, looks only with horror on the theories of the English or German thinker. Heilbrun was known as one of the foremost leaders of the modern revolt, and the house that held him was regarded as accursed. Even Lessing, whose benefaction to every needy soul in his way knew no stint, shared in the odium; and Meg, whose silence and reserve repelled any advance from the few women who had been daring enough to approach her, came to mean part of the general mystery. Men nodded significantly at first as they caught glimpses of her, and women watched her infrequent comings and goings with a sense that they were defrauded of details that ought to be neighborhood property.

"Him that looked over the head of ivery woman, an' made as if he'd never a thought toward 'em, an'

thin to bring in baby an' all without iver a word. He 's a bould one, an' she too," they said.

Meg knew nothing of the theories about her. Her one thought was, escape from every trace of the past, and she hesitated now what answer to make Lessing.

"Felix Alexander is enough," she said at last. "That will do for first name and last name too."

"Shall he not have your own, then ?"

"No, no," Meg said; "I want his name all good. I never want him to know where he came from or what he is. Must he ?"

"That, time will tell to you," Lessing said, with a long look at her; and Meg turned away relieved. There were years yet in which no such need could arise, and people here had long ago stopped questioning, one or two of the older ones coming at last to reconstruct their opinions and believe that, after all, the crazy German had taken her in for charity. Now and then a woman made her way through the shop, and sat for a time talking to and about the baby; but Meg's silence made such visits not only embarrassing but uninteresting. Nothing was to be gained, evidently, save a knowledge of the interior, by the most persistent visitor. To women she was impenetrable. Men she understood up to a certain point. Her life had lain with them, and granny had been the only suggestion of the feminine element, in all the years till Gid met her. In her Meg had found all the brutality of her father, mingled with meaner qualities than Duke, even at his worst, had ever shown. Men were bad, but women were worse; and Meg preferred men. That her present life was peculiar never occurred to her. She looked up to Lessing with something of the same feeling she had had for Margaret, and worked for him with a devotion strengthening with every month. He was as far apart from other men as Margaret, if she were alive, must be from other

women. Other men looked at her with a suggestion of the evil she had once known so well. Even these strange people who gathered here every week found time now and then for a consideration of the silent, beautiful woman who listened and gave no sign whether she shared their dreams or no; but Lessing might have been her father. He kissed the baby, and fondled it; and often the little Felix ran out now in the early morning to the hammock Lessing refused to exchange for any bed, and shook it till he was lifted up for a frolic. Lessing looked at him sometimes anxiously as the child made the inarticulate noise that stood for speech; and Meg, though she knew next to nothing of children, wondered if they were all as backward. In their Sunday excursions, in which they went usually to the Park, carrying a lunch and choosing some sheltered and quiet spot where the baby could tumble on the grass and Lessing read or talk at will, there was never indication that the child noticed sounds of any sort. He cried but seldom, and only when in a passion, and nothing could make him respond to his name. Meg held him lately, Lessing had noticed, and watched his mouth, and made sudden sharp noises with poker or shovel against the stove, and one evening as he slept threw both of them violently against the wall. He did not stir, though Lessing had sprung up alarmed at the sudden demonstration. She looked at him silently and beseechingly.

"Poor mother!" he said. "It is true, Meg. He will never answer us. He is dumb."

"I won't have it!" Meg cried, with sudden rage. "I won't have it! I've always been good to him, even in the very first when I hated him. An' now, when — I love him! — I won't have it! You must do something. Is n't there something can be cut and let his little tongue loose?"

"No, poor Meg, there is nothing," Lessing answered pitifully. "I knew it months ago, but hoped till hope was no more possible. But he shall go to the schools where such as he are taught, and he will learn everything. Not yet, foolish Meg!" for Meg had cried out, and caught the sleeping baby from the bed.

"I shall never let him go," she said. "They might steal him. He shall never go anywhere without me."

"There is much time to think of all that; three — four years even. But, Meg, why have you fear? Who could want him?"

Meg was crying passionately.

"I don't know! I don't know!" she said, through her sobs. "But I dream about Gid's coming and getting him. If he knew where he was, he would take him away."

"If you had been really married, that might be, Meg. Then, when Felix came to seven years, he could take him. That is law. But now, he is yours, — only yours. You may do as you will, and no one can take him from you."

Meg clasped the child tight, and sat rocking back and forth.

"Do you think the water did it?" she said at last, with another burst of crying. "Do you think it choked away all his voice?"

"Who can tell, Meg? It is not there, and that is all we know. It may be in the blood. All the more we will love him. He shall not be miserable. He shall have the best."

Meg looked up, comforted in spite of herself, as Lessing stooped and patted the baby cheek, round and flushed with slumber, then turned away to his books.

"See now, Meg," he said presently. "It is two years that I say that when Felix is ready to know

books, you too should know. That is five years away, — quite five, and we know now that our teaching is not to be. All the more, then, you need what must wait no more. Will you study, Meg, and tell to me what you learn? There is time enough. Your mind is quick. I see that well, daily; and if you learn, soon you can help me."

"Whatever I do is wrong," Meg said humbly. "I don't know words like you. You can't speak as Heilbrun does, — so smooth and easy, — but you speak different from me. I don't believe I can learn. I remember things, and know what they mean better and better; and I heard last week when Heilbrun was still and had nothing to say to the tall man that told him like this: 'Gentle speech, like gentle breeding, is born with one, and has generations of gentle breeding back of it. It is accident only that may make this untrue.' I knew then there could n't be anything gentle for me, but I said to myself you could help Felix to it, for you had it."

Meg spoke slowly, almost with Heilbrun's soft precision, and colored a little as Lessing looked at her, well pleased.

"It is not the same Meg," he said, "that speaks to-day that spoke two years ago. And for this talk of generations, it is true and it is false, like all the rest of this fool world. I myself — I know it well — speak not like Heilbrun. Always the English will take German ways; and always it will, for I cannot do different. Blood is bad! Well, we know it, and that is half. Now we fight it, and soul shall beat blood. My Meg, I see well that you are not the same. Blood is strong, but soul shall be stronger. And mine shall be of the fight also. I help you always; and some day you forget that bad blood, and know it is all clear and free-running, — all good, when the bad is thrown out, and the soul knows its

own. Now see, Meg. Put Felix away, and we begin to-night."

Lessing's blue eyes were deep and tender; and Meg, as she passed him, looked at him with a sort of adoration. Learn! She would be cut in little pieces if he desired it. No one had ever lived so good as he — so unworldly, so loving. Suppose he had been her father. What might not have been learned and lived by this time? But there was time still, as he had said; and she came back to the table strewn with books and papers, and read patiently, listening to his explanations, and trying to tell what it was about when he had taken the book and asked for the same thing in her own words.

Slowly, with month after month of patient effort, Meg came to understand what books had for her. She despaired at moments; but Lessing's faith in her never failed, and that she felt must be justified at any cost. She wrote now a hand round and clear as print, and copied for him the numberless facts and figures written in little note-books small enough to be easily concealed if necessary. For, more and more, Lessing went about among the working-people, making for himself tables of their employments, their wages from year to year, their expenditures. He knew the story of every industry, — its origin, its needs, and its probable destiny. Three days in the week he gave to his earning, for which there was steady demand from a fellow-worker, whose orders were more than he could fill alone. Felix watched him as he worked, and sometimes attempted to imitate him, to Lessing's great delight. With their simple living, the money earned in this way, and a small sum that came to Lessing monthly from Germany, more than sufficed, and he was thus able to spend the remaining three days in his researches, and in putting them in such shape that Meg could write them

out clearly. Her memory held it all; and often when, in the evening discussions, he was at a loss for a figure or fact, she supplied it in a quiet tone that repelled comment. People came now that had never been there before, and Heilbrun shook his head and threatened to change his quarters.

Meg retreated more often now to her own room, stealing out to Lessing's corner if the strange faces numbered less than usual, but gaining confidence in time, as no one annoyed her.

One evening, as a fierce debate went on, there entered with one of the new-comers a figure she had never forgotten, and she rose in terror and fled silently to Felix in the inner room. It was the hospital doctor, older now, and with a full beard, but the same searching eyes and mass of red-brown hair. Why she dreaded his recognition she could hardly have told, for he had been only kind; but every reminder of the old days was a pain, and she watched carefully each evening lest he should suddenly come upon her and speak. "Who are they?" Meg asked one evening when all had gone. "They do not look like the others; I think they have never lived much."

"They have lived but in one way," Lessing answered. "Ah, you know well now, Megchen, how the face will tell its story in spite of the owner. Two of them are artists, and of all men are artists most limited unless their eyes have felt the chrism. I mean they think but of colors and lines, and passion and thought and all sorrow of human life are but things to copy. So they study us all, and care a little. Sometimes there is one who cares much, and to him will come the real vision. There was one such here with us last night. The rest, they are journalists, — men that work on papers, Meg."

"A journalist has no soul," Heilbrun growled. "It is only a sensation bag, and lies open to what will

touch and tickle them. They come because they say we are talking of great questions, but it is only to hear what is new and strange to their ears. For brotherhood is a vain word, and equality a dream, and we are but babblers of mysteries neither we nor they can penetrate. I wish them away."

To Meg, whose serious eyes watched them all, and who even tolerated Heilbrun at last (for his thoughts' sake, never for his own), it was an education, an initiation, impossible under any other circumstances. With every year of this sheltered, shielded life, as alone in the great city as if Atlantis held them, she grew into an understanding of Lessing's deepest desire. What the end was to be she never asked; perhaps she never thought. He was her providence, and that of the child who followed him with the same worshipping observation Meg gave him. For Felix was eight years old, and in September had entered a school for the deaf and dumb. Meg made no more opposition, only begged that he might come home at night, and that she might go and come for him. Sometimes Lessing took her place; but usually she anticipated him, and in her plain black dress, and the close little bonnet she had settled upon and always wore as the least noticeable and safest uniform, she attracted small attention, save now and then from a keener observer than usual, who noted in surprise the rich coloring and the warm youth half concealed, yet glowing in the quiet figure. Felix rushed to meet her always with a delight that was only matched by her own. She had forgotten almost that once she had hated him, and poured out a love that was answered by one as strong as the child-soul could hold. Life was good at last. Peace, and happy work, and years of equal calm stretched away before her. The old Meg had vanished. Could it be that she had ever really lived?

April had come again; and Meg thought, as she walked, of the springing grass in the parks, and went out of her way to give Felix a few minutes among the crocuses and hyacinths in Madison Square. He had looked at them in a sort of ecstasy as she sat down on a bench and watched him, and now she rose and took the little brown hand in hers. A man brushed against her rudely as she turned, and stopped in open-mouthed surprise as he looked under the close bonnet.

"I'll be blowed if it ain't Meg!" a voice said; and Meg, speechless with terror, found herself face to face with Gid.

V.

TO the day of her death Meg remembered the pause that came as she stood there, silent, her eyes fixed on the evil face over which an expression was stealing that she did not understand. That the face was evil, was her only distinct impression. She did not note that Gid was better dressed than when she left him, and that much flashy jewelry in pins and rings witnessed to his prosperity. He had grown stouter; his bearing was more assured; and he seemed precisely what he was, a successful political leader of a bucket-shop constituency. He had supposed Meg long ago dead and under ground, and now and then, in maudlin moments, had often said, "Poor Meg! she was fonder of me than anybody's ever been." But to meet her alive, and not only alive, but respectable to an incredible degree, was a shock, an outrage even, as he thought of it. She looked like a lady, almost. She was handsomer than ever. By George! Why should n't they make it up, and try it over again? His small eyes lighted, and he smiled on Meg, who shrunk back, still silent.

"So you 've been trying the respectable dodge and turned nurse," he said. "Seems to me it 's pretty late for your high-flyer's children to be out; but you 've got reasons, more 'n likely, for taking your time."

Meg had thrown one arm about Felix and drawn him to her closely, an anguish of terror in her heart lest in some way Gid should know and claim him; but with the words a way of deliverance opened before her. Felix knew the way home perfectly, and,

with a rapid sign or two, she had said to him, with an imperativeness that he felt as well as saw: "Run, and do not stop till you are at home and have shut the door."

The child, whose eyes had been fixed threateningly on Gid's face, hesitated an instant. There was trouble, he knew, and he held Meg's hand till again she had motioned him away, and he obeyed with a sudden sense of fear that sent him flying down Twenty-third Street.

"It 's just as well he 's gone," Gid said. "Sit down here, Meg, and let 's have a little talk, now that little pitchers ain't on hand. By George, Meg! if you was dressed up the way you 'd ought to be, you 'd cut a bigger dash 'n you ever did. Sit down, I say."

Meg obeyed mechanically. Anything to turn his attention from Felix, and prevent his asking questions. She would not look at Gid. Her eyes were fixed on the ground, from which strange lights seemed to rise and surround her. She was cold, and shivered as she shrunk to the end of the bench and waited.

"It 's a queer dodge for you," Gid said, with another long look and a slight frown as he felt the silent opposition surrounding her like a wall. "Anybody 'd have said you 'd been born a district schoolma'am, to see you now. Your fine folks you work for would n't like it much to hear the kind o' thing you really was born to an' lived in."

Still silence. Gid moved a little nearer.

"Come, Meg, pot need n't call kettle black, need it? Let bygones be bygones. I 'm as respectable as you, an' I 'm a mind to make up for some o' the hard times. It don't suit me to have my wife somebody's hired help, when I 've got enough to make a fair show with her. The boys think a heap of me, Meg, and I 'm just as likely to be alderman as another man. You come home with me, and we 'll try it again."

Gid was nearer still; his hot breath, reeking with whiskey and tobacco, on her face. He laid his hand on her arm.

"Come, Meg. Silence gives consent. You ain't one to lay up any grudge. Come on. What! That 's your game, is it? We 'll see who can carry things highest."

Meg had risen and looked about despairingly for a policeman; and now, as a benevolent-looking old gentleman walked slowly by, his eyes fixed on them with interest as a pair who were probably love-making without the smallest thought of spectators, she sprang forward and caught his arm.

"Help me to get away!" she cried. "I want to go home, and this man is hindering me."

"A man generally has a right to hinder his own wife," Gid said, stepping forward, and touching his forehead significantly.

"I am not your wife. You told me long ago I was not," Meg cried.

Gid only smiled, and again tapped his forehead.

"She 's been sick, an' she ain't quite herself," he said. "She an' me can settle it."

The old gentleman looked suspiciously at both, and shook off Meg's hand.

"Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands; you know that, my good girl?" he said, a little pity in his face as he saw her despairing look.

"He 's not my husband. I have no husband!" she said; and now she wrenched herself away from Gid, and ran toward the street. In a moment he had overtaken her, and held her fast.

"If you won't come quietly," he said, with a stream of oaths, "I 'll see that you 're in a cell to-night, and in the lunatic ward to-morrow on the Island."

"Let me go, Gid!" Meg cried, calling him by his name at last. "Let me go! I 'll never trouble you. I 'll keep out of your way. I only want to go home."

"That 's just where you 're going, and you 'd better be lively about it. Step along, now!" Gid said, hailing a car; and in a moment Meg found herself pushed into it, and sat down in helpless terror and bewilderment. They got out presently, and walked down a little way, entering then another square. Meg knew it instantly. Eight years ago — nine almost — she had sat here all day, and looked at the tall towers of St. George's Church, and waited for night to come. Night had come again, but there was no merciful water waiting for her; no escape from this net that had suddenly closed about her. The square was almost deserted, and Gid seated her and then himself on a bench almost hidden by thick shrubbery, and looked at her with a grin.

"You might 'a' known you could n't get ahead of me," he said. "Come, Meg, I know it 's a little hard on you, but I ain't going to hurt you. You see, it 's a fact. I never supposed you 'd take things just the way you did, without finding out or nothing. It was a kind of a joke, you know. I was mashed on that little Pauline, with her yaller hair an' big eyes, but it did n't last. She ran through in a day more 'n I could make in a month, an' I got tired of it. You had the same chance, but I swow I like you better for not having taken it. No, Meg, we was married, fair an' square; an' fair an' square we 're married now. I hain't ever seen a woman anywhere that come up to you for out-and-out handsomeness. There ain't any reason why you should n't cut a bigger dash 'n you ever did. What 's the use in takin' on so? Give a feller a chance."

"The child! the child!" Meg moaned under her breath, clenching her hands as she tried to keep quiet. There was no other way. If it was safest for the child, she must even go with this wild beast that had suddenly sprung upon her.

"Oh, come!" Gid said, with a loud laugh. "You need n't pretend you cared so much for a child you just had to fetch and carry for. There 's an end of all that, Meg. I ain't even particular about knowin' how you got into such a place. You was smart enough to humbug the devil, an' you told a straight enough yarn, I 'll bet. Come, Meg! We 've fooled enough. If you 're thinking about your clothes, I 'll get you whatever toggery you want. Make up your mind to go in for fun, and be like you used to was, you know."

Meg rose slowly. Here, on this spot where she had waited to fulfil her vow and give the child she hated to death, her punishment had come. Well, then, let it be borne silently. If she had given death, she now gave life. With every power in her, she barred evil from the child, dearer than her own life or many lives. She should know better what to do soon. Perhaps the river must end it. The river should end it, if she found there was no release in any other way. Gid looked at her curiously. Now that the capture was made, he was not so certain that it meant all he had for the moment fancied that it might. He even wavered as he felt into what spaces beyond him Meg had passed. It would be an awful sell if she looked like this all the time, and the boys would think he had gone out of his mind. Then he set his teeth. She was his, anyway. There were two to swear to it still, and, for all her airs, he was master, and would make her feel it if she did n't turn easy. What had she done to herself, anyhow? Gid swore again once or twice, then sprang up with affected ease.

"We 'll take another car, Meg, an' go on down. I ain't far from the old spot. It 's a better house, — 'round on Madison Street, you know, for I would n't leave the Ward for the best house anywhere else you could give me. I 've been there two years, — one o'

those big houses some big bug used to live in, an' they 're all respectable folks in it, an' earn a good living. We 'll be snug as a bug in a rug, if you 're a mind to think so."

Meg followed him silently; and, after a threatening look or two, Gid decided that perhaps there had been too many words, and he would try her policy for a time. Meg shuddered as he led her in at last to the broad hall and unlocked the door of the front room.

"You see, I 'm a swell," he said. "Got the best rooms in the house; an' I 'll break that Suke's head if she leaves her things round," he added, kicking away a garment or two dropped about.

There were signs of a woman's occupation of the rooms; but Meg did not note them as she sank down by the window and looked up and down the street, silent compared with the swarming ones on either side.

"Watts's wife looks after the rooms," Gid said, with another kick, "an' she 's a mighty sight too free with them. I 'll give her a piece of my mind soon. Now, Meg, we want some supper. I 'll go out for some oysters, an' we 'll cook 'em right here if you say so; or maybe you 'd like best to go to a saloon. See here," he added, as Meg made no response, "you may as well stop these airs. I 'll do the fair thing by you if you behave yourself, and if you don't it 'll be the worse for you. I ain't the soft fool I was nine or ten years ago. You do your part, an' I 'll do mine. Will you go out, or will you stay in?"

"In," Meg said faintly.

"Let it be 'in,' then," Gid answered. "No tricks, my lady. I 'll lock the door to make sure; but if you do try to slip off, I 'll make you wish you had n't never thought of it, that 's all. Take off your things now, an' let 's see if we can't take some comfort."

Meg untied her bonnet; and as she did so the

sudden thought of the little room where she had put it on came over her, and, with a stifled cry, she threw herself down and burst into tears.

"That 's good," Gid said approvingly. "When the rain begins the worst o' the storm 's over. You 'll be all right by morning, Meg, an' wondering how you acted so like a fool over night." And he went out, locking the door behind him.

Meg set her teeth, forcing back the sobs that shook her, as she sat up and pressed her hands against her burning eyes. She hated herself that she had broken down before him for a moment. For the child's sake she must be quiet. There must be some way of letting Lessing know that she had not gone away voluntarily; that she was safe, and that he must care for Felix till she returned. She knew little of law; but if Gid had told the truth, if she was really his wife and the other story had been a lie for his own purposes, he had the right, and could ruin the boy's life even more thoroughly than he had now ruined hers. Over herself he had no more power. She had loved him long ago, — centuries, it seemed to her, as she sat there motionless, the years unrolling before her, and the old life plain once more. Bit by bit the mosaic grew before her, deed and word fitting in, each in its own place; and Meg sat, her eyes strained and wide as if the visible picture were before her. It was all true. She had been and done nothing but evil. A chance had swept her beyond its power. She had forgotten in these quiet years what she was and where she belonged. She had meant to forget, but fate had been stronger than she. She was in her own place again, and must bear what might come, silently. Gid was strong. She had obeyed him always so long as they were together. Could it be that she must obey him again? And once more Meg cried aloud, and ran up and down the room, moaning

as she went. She must live for Felix, yet how could she live? There was a knife on the table, and she took it up and pressed the edge against her throat, then threw it down. That was not the way of escape. No, she must be patient, and watch and wait, and steal away at last. And if she could not, there were other uses for the knife. She took it up once more, and looked at the edge. People were hung for murder, but nobody hung a mother who had only wanted to get her own child. Then she threw it down with a shudder.

"Only cowards will take themselves out of life," she remembered Lessing had said one day. "There is but one, and shall it not be lived bravely to the end?" At least she would try; and once more she sat down and forced herself to quiet and such submission as must be.

There followed many days, in which the same struggle went on. Gid's pride had been roused. He meant to conquer again with this woman who did his bidding and cared for this place he called home, yet looked at him always as if from some other world. He took her about with him a little, forcing her to put on the finery he brought her; and she obeyed silently. Now and then he put his elbows on the table and studied her. She was half-cracked, — much more than he had thought. She had taken things hard nine years ago, and never got over it; very flattering to him, but no woman in her right mind could stand out against the sort of thing he was doing for her now. What sense she had ever had was gone; and though she had looked handsome enough that night in the Square, it was a dead-and-alive handsomeness, and he had had about enough of it. Why would n't she wake up and let out the old dare-devil Meg that must be tucked away somewhere? At moments he reviled her for her hypocrisy. She had

found that it paid to put on a long face and go like a Sister of Charity with her eyes down, but it would n't go down with him. And then he flung away, swearing; to find himself, in no long time, again watching her and seeking to make some impression. She came and went now freely, but always with the sense that he was never far behind, and that a step beyond her appointed bound would be known and punished. She had no money. Her little purse had been left in the drawer at home that afternoon in which she had left it, so certain of the peace that had ended then forever; and she dare not borrow of any one in the house.

"She was not quite right in her head, but would be before long," Gid had explained to the people in the house, taking great credit to himself for having found her and being willing to take her back again. They looked at her suspiciously when they came in, and the children shrunk away from her as she passed them in the hall.

"There goes the crazy woman!" one of them called after her one afternoon, and Meg thought heavily: "He says that, and they all say it, and it must be so. If it is n't, it will be soon, unless I can get away."

To write to Lessing had been her first thought; but a fortnight had passed and she had found no means. There was a bit of pencil in her pocket, but, without paper or stamp, of what use was it? She would have pawned something and bought both, but she had lost all courage. Somehow Gid would be sure to find her out, and in that way the child. Lessing must think her what he would: base, ungrateful, vile as the slums from which he had taken her and to which Heilbrun would say she had returned of her own free will. Heilbrun had been jealous of her always, though he loved Felix. There would be nothing too bad for him to say. Even if she went back they would not believe her; and up and down the sorrow-

ful gamut her thoughts went to and fro, her eyes growing sadder and more desperate every day.

She had dreamed of Felix at last. The child had stood before her, when a fortnight of this musing had passed, and stretched out his arms to her with the inarticulate cry that meant always pain or grief; and Meg had started up with an answering cry: "Felix! Felix! O Felix!"

"So that's it, is it?" Gid had said, with a blow and a stream of oaths. "I thought I'd get at it somehow. There's a feller in the way, for all your airs, an' that's the reason what's lawfully yours ain't fit to wipe your feet on. I'll mash your face if you don't tell me where he hangs out, an' I'll mash his when I've found him. Speak now, or I'll find a way to make you!"

Meg had been lying on the narrow lounge, asleep. She had heard the sunset gun from Governor's Island, and shut her eyes as she waited for Gid to come in from some of his haunts. Such force as was left to her she gathered together. He might kill her if he would, but no word more should betray her.

"Will you tell?" Gid said again, wrenching her arm as he pulled her from the lounge. He had been drinking more than usual, and was wild with unreasoning fury. Meg smiled as she looked at him, — a pale, triumphant smile. This was best. He would kill her, and then Felix would be safe always — always. She cried out once as Gid struck her heavily on the breast.

"Will you tell?" he said.

"No, no!" she cried once more; and then the blows fell, — cruel blows that brought quickly merciful unconsciousness. No one had heard; and she lay, face downward, and motionless, where she had fallen, as Gid, with a final kick, stood there, and looked at his work.

"Get up!" he said. "Get up if you don't want more."

Some one tried the door; and Gid, with an oath, lifted her, and laid her on the lounge again. He felt her heart beat as he did so, and was reassured. For a moment he had turned sick with the fear that he had killed her. He opened the door, and told the time to the man who had heard the sounds, and made the question an excuse to look in curiously.

"She 's asleep," Gid said. "She 's sick, an' more flighty 'n ever."

The man eyed him; but Gid returned his look composedly, and shut the door. It was a bad job, anyway. He had been a big fool, and was well paid for it, and she was well paid too. She deserved all she had got; but now they were even, and she might go where she pleased. There were plenty of women ready for him that would jump at the chance he had given her. He got water and washed away the blood from her face, and felt of her arms to see if any bones were broken. What was there, anyway, in a pale face and big eyes that should make him care whether she was fond of him or not? When she came to herself he would tell her that she could go about her business as soon as she pleased. Now he flung out sulkily when he had seen her eyes open slowly, and went into the concert saloon from which he had come.

Meg struggled back to herself at last. Her breath came with pain, and she was bruised and sore; but she could move, and presently rose and bound up her hair. This was the end. He had not killed her, as she had expected; but he would come back. There was only one way of safety, — the river. It was near, and she could steal out softly. No; she would go naturally, as if she wanted a walk, and when nobody was looking, make her way down the pier, near the ferry, where the current was strong. If she could only send one word to Lessing, it would make it

easier. How could she die without telling him why? She tied on the close bonnet Gid hated, and wrapped her shawl around her bruised and aching shoulders and breast, then slowly, each step a pain, passed out and down toward Cherry Street, crowded with drunken sailors and brazen women, and girls whose only trace of real girlhood was their youth. She had seen it all, day after day, and said to herself, "This is where you belong, Meg, and you know it," and to-night she watched them as she crept along, and wondered if any of them had as heavy a heart as she carried. On by the police station, where uniformed men lounged and jested with the women who passed them, or threatened an over-loud sailor as he rolled by. On by the high tenement-houses and the bucket-shops where their earnings were swallowed up; down Water Street, where great warehouses were side by side with sailors' boarding-houses and more bucket-shops, — the one a part of the other. The squeak of cheap fiddles sounded from them, — shouts of laughter, oaths, and sometimes sharp cries. Then through it all came another sound, — a rush of singing voices. She stopped in the shadow and looked down the street. She remembered the tune, for Ben had whistled it for a month; and now, as she listened, there was a pause, and then, once more, the sound of an organ. Meg crossed the street and walked down to the building. There was something comforting in the sound, and she had the right to a moment's comfort. The door stood open. It was a hall, and filled with people. A woman was at the organ; and as she played, the words rose up from the throng, each one clear and plain, —

"For weary feet remains a street
Of wondrous pave and golden;
For hearts that ache the angels wake
The story sweet and olden."

What it meant she did not know; but as the chorus came, —

> "We're going home, we're going home, —
> We 're going home to-morrow,"

she leaned against the door, and tears streamed down her face. Oh, if she might but go home!

"Come in, you poor soul!" a voice said; and some one took her arm and guided her to a seat close by the door. Some one was talking, — a tall man, who smiled and nodded as he saw that another had entered, and then went on: —

"Every soul of us has got to have his help, great and small. Everybody needs help. Put us all in a bag and shake us up; s'pose there'd be much difference when we came out? Eh? You hear some people say the Bible is a sham, and religion a hoax. Well, it may be to them, but it's the Lord's own power to me. Why, look at me, every one of you, friends! Eleven years ago I was a loafer and a rough. Head on me like a mop; big scar across my nose all the time. I wonder I've got a nose when I remember all the licks it got. There ain't a drunken rowdy round the corner worse lookin' than I was, nor more deservin' punishment. I cursed God! I held up my hands and cursed him for givin' me life! Why had he put me in a hell on earth? Why had he made me a thief and a rascal, while he gave other people money and fun? And then it came across me that he had n't done one o' these things. It was me that had brought myself to what I was. I had made myself a drunkard and a thief, and then blamed him for it! Where was my common sense? If you want some, — an' who don't, — ask him for it. It's time now to change the meetin'. There's men here that work hard all day, and I'm bound to let 'em out at nine o'clock. We've no time for long speeches, but I'll

tell you again, what I 'm never tired of tellin', — an' may it save some soul here to-night! — that this blessed Jesus saved me. There 's no sham about it! Yes! when I was such a mean, nasty wretch of a sinner that I had n't a home or a friend, this dear, blessed Jesus picked me up out of the mud an' saved me from wantin' to do such things. It 's this same Jesus that died for every poor fellow here that has n't got any home to-night. Come to him, an' you 'll find home, an' friends, an' whatever it is you want most."

Meg's eyes were riveted on the speaker. Jesus was a name only. What it all meant, why he had such power, she did not know. But this man, whose smile was sweet and tender, and who stretched out his arms as if he would gather in every sad soul, — he was good, he might be trusted.

"Come up and be prayed for!" he called; and Meg obeyed the beckoning hand, and as others knelt, kneeled too, feeling that help was somehow near.

He had looked in her eyes as she came near, and put out his hand to the voiceless appeal. She was close to him, and now he too knelt and said: "Let us all pray for our sister in trouble, an' for everybody in trouble, here an' everywhere."

He was speaking to some one as he went on. Some one who was strong and who always helped. Meg did not know what half of it meant, but she put out her hand and touched the speaker a moment. When everybody had gone she would tell him her story. He had risen now, and bent over her, and said, —

"Pray for yourself, poor soul!"

Meg shook her head. Tears were streaming down her face.

"You can't be helped without you 're willin' to ask for it," the voice said reproachfully.

"I do ask for it. I shall die without it," Meg said. "I will tell you when the rest are gone."

The man shook his head, but went on to the next. Her turn might come, even if she did not seem to know what he was talking about. Meg listened, but her head swam and her ears were ringing. She rose with the rest, slowly and painfully, for she grew sorer every moment. The blood was running down her face from the cut near her ear that one of Gid's rings had made; and she wiped it away, but it still trickled down. Some one came near.

"You are hurt," a voice said. "Come with me. You need n't wait for the meeting to be over."

"No, no," Meg said, struggling with this sudden sense of falling. "No, no! I can only tell him."

"He will come to you; you shall tell him everything. Come upstairs to my own room, and nobody shall see you but Jerry an' me."

"Is he Jerry?" Meg's hand pointed to the man, who was speaking again.

"Yes, he is Jerry. Come."

It had all been whispered, but no one noticed. There was always somebody in special trouble; and they hardly looked as Meg rose to her feet, and, holding blindly to the hand put out, struggled up the stairs and on through a room or two. Then she staggered.

"I 'm going to die, after all," she said. "Felix! Felix!" and then she felt herself sinking down, not into darkness, but to light, and cried, "Felix!" again, and knew no more.

She was in bed when at last she opened her eyes, and everything seemed fresh and cool and sweet. She was not bewildered at all. It was all strange; but this man, who was willing to help, stood in the doorway and smiled at her as she looked at him.

"Go to sleep," he said. "I'll not hear a word of it to-night. You 're safe here, an' here you shall stay till we see what to do. Maria, there, 's a good nurse, an' she 's fixed you up nice and comfortable. Go to sleep, an' the good Lord comfort your sore soul."

"He 's right," the quiet voice near her said. You 've been takin' it awfully. Whoever did it must have been drunk enough to serve you so. Now, go to sleep, an' we 'll see you ain't hurt again."

Meg held fast to the kind hand that brushed back her hair. How peaceful it was, even through the noise from the street! She had forgotten that the river was to have been her bed to-night, and she closed her eyes obediently, and soon slept. She started and cried out now and then; but always the same hand touched her, and the quiet voice said, "You must n't be afraid, you are with friends," and she slept again.

She woke at last, still sore, but peaceful. Some one brought her a cup of coffee and some toast, and she ate and drank, and felt her courage coming back. She saw her clothes near her, and presently got up, finding that she could move about better than she had feared. She dressed slowly, the cool water refreshing and strengthening her, and when the door opened, though she started involuntarily, turned with a look of gratitude as she saw the same face that had been near her in the night.

"I did n't mean you should get up; but as you have, come out now, an' we 'll have a talk. Jerry 's there," the woman added, as Meg shrunk a little; "an' he 's waiting to know how we can help you."

Meg fixed her eyes on him searchingly, as she sat down in the corner of the sofa, and faced him, — a tall, gaunt man, with pale face and deep-set eyes. He did not look quite the same this morning; but as he smiled, and put out his hand, her trust revived.

"Tell the whole," he said, "no matter what it is, an' we'll tell no one, unless you want us to." And Meg, whose eyes still searched his, took courage, and slowly, with long pauses between, told them her life, and what the last fortnight had brought.

"I know the crowd," Jerry said between his teeth, "an I've seen him among 'em. But why did n't you run? He was nought but a bullyin' blackguard. He would n't have followed you."

Meg shook her head. She did not quite know herself why she had not braved him.

"It was the child, you see," she said. "I had to save him."

"An' you had to be saved yourself," Jerry answered. "How can it be that in a Christian land there's as many heathen as would stock a foreign mission? You, lost in more ways than one, an' never carin' but for the one."

"Don't press her, Jerry," the woman said. "The Lord's brought her here, an' he's going to see her through."

"Can I go home?" Meg said. "Will it do? Oh, if I can go to-day!"

"Don't you want to wait a bit till your bruises are better an' you can go without any marks?"

"I don't want to wait, — I can't wait an hour, if only you're sure it'll do Felix no harm," Meg cried.

"Easy now, easy!" Jerry answered. "I'm goin' round to see what there is to know about this man, an' how far he's got right of any sort. You rest, an' Maria'll tell you some of the things you don't know, — the Lord forgive you, an' them that let you stay that way! — an' then one of us 'll go up an' make the way easy for you with the man that's cared for you, if you're sure it's in the right way it's been done."

Meg's eyes blazed.

"How dare you speak that way? Oh, don't mind! You that seemed like an angel, too. But you don't know him nor me."

"Hush, now!" Jerry said, but with a smile that showed he should question no longer. "Hush now, an' 't won't be so many hours before you 'll be where your heart is. I wish 't was as hot for some other things, but there 's hope it may be. There 's hope."

Meg lay down again, and tried to rest and be patient as she waited his return; but the minutes were hours, and as the time dragged on and noon passed, she grew cold with fear. Suppose Gid should come here and make her go back with him. Suppose he should guess who Felix was, and spring upon him as he had sprung upon her. She tried to listen and understand as the woman brought a Testament and read here and there, but it was useless; and the reader felt it so, and shut the book.

At last he was there; and Meg, who had been walking back and forth in the little room, ran out to meet him, and burst into crying as she saw his grave face.

"It 's all right," he said hastily. "I 'm only sorry for the brute, — for a brute he is, an' worse. He 'll never trouble you again. It 's Padgett told me. You did n't see Padgett last night, but he saw you, and thought it was a ghost, he said. He knows it all. There 's a dozen women have lived with him, an' he 's no more your husband than theirs. He lied, this last time the same as the first. I 'll eat a bit, an' then go on up to your place, an' you an' Maria come on half an hour later. An' then your troubles 'll all be over, for that part of them. Now, what 'll you do for me?"

"I 'd give you all I had in the whole world!" Meg cried. "But I 've nothing! What can I do?"

"Come here to us, and learn who the Lord is, you poor, blind soul!"

"I don't dare. I never want to come down in the Ward again," Meg said; then flushed hotly. "You know what I mean. I might meet him."

"Then you will pray for yourself?"

"What for? You have done everything for me," Meg said simply.

"We'll go and see you, then," Jerry said, after a pause in which his wife shook her head at him. "An' you'll be prayed for till you find out you've got to pray for yourself. Now you must eat an' get quiet, for you don't want to scare the child."

Was it an hour, or a day, or a month, before he had really gone, and Meg was at last allowed to put on her bonnet, and, with terrified looks to right and to left as they went down to the ferry, found herself at last in a Bleecker Street car, blocked incessantly the first half of the way, but still bringing her nearer and nearer her haven? They were there at last; and, as in a dream, Meg opened the door and saw Lessing's pale face and shining eyes, and Heilbrun standing near and smiling at her, and heard the cry her dream had heard, and held the child who rushed to her, trembling, and with clasping arms. Only a fortnight, yet she had died many times, and now was alive at last. Jerry fell on his knees and prayed, Lessing bowing his head with reverence for the feeling that prompted the unnecessary act; and Heilbrun looked at him with speculative eyes, making no sign nor comment.

"It's a good job, well begun," Jerry said, as he left them, "but it's only begun. I'd rather deal with a cartload of common sinners, but I'm bound to find out some way o' dealin' with you."

"You shall deal as you will; it is much I owe you," Lessing said, his hands holding him fast. "As

you will. There is no man I like better to serve well."

"'T ain't me that needs servin'," was the answer. "But maybe it 'll come." And the pair hurried away to sinners more susceptible to their methods than the group for whom but one thought was possible,— that the lost was found, and peace and love once more at home in the narrow dwelling.

VI.

THE paper had nearly ended, though the reader had ingeniously prevented any certain knowledge as to what were final pages by including a number of blank ones, and thus only those nearest could discover where manuscript ended and blank began. Mrs. Herndon's eyes were fixed upon her; inscrutable eyes her admirers called them, and there were hints now and then that they had need to be. They were brown eyes, singularly clear and direct in their look, and only long schooling could have brought about the sense that the steady gaze hid much more than it revealed.

To-night the bars were down. Mrs. Herndon was bored; and she showed it so unmistakably that a shocked glance passed between Mr. J. B. P. H. Hurst, the rising art-critic, a small and foxy-looking little Englishman, known to his detractors as "Alphabet Hurst," and Miss Barstow, also an art-critic, who at intervals took notes with a delicate emphasis of attention just escaping the charge of enthusiasm, — a charge more damaging to a member of the organization than that of violating any three commandments could have been.

For it was the Ultimate Club which at present devoted itself with more or less affable attention to the propositions laid down by Mrs. Chichester Kirk, the wife of the most prominent art-critic of the day. Mr. Chichester Kirk was absent. Not that modesty was overpowering enough to make his presence

during an hour's advertisement of his own methods in the slightest degree uncomfortable to himself. Mrs. Chichester Kirk had requested it, feeling that freer scope could be had in his absence; and the hostess of the evening, who had arranged his various treatises on Decorative and Applied Art, so that wherever the great authority seated himself he should find convincing tokens that he was read and admired, looked as disturbed as good breeding allowed when Mrs. Chichester Kirk entered alone.

"Mr. Kirk is to drop in later," she explained, giving a decorative twist to an abnormally long scarlet crape scarf, fastened on one shoulder by a large cameo, and wound about her at unexpected points in the drapery of a limp white India silk. The æsthetic era had not dawned, and sage greens were still in embryo; the demand being chiefly for pure color, for which the Club professed a passion.

"I have no ideas outside of his, you know," Mrs. Chichester Kirk continued. "Our union of thought is so perfect that I merely voice him in a different key. But I felt that I could enlarge and urge where he could not, and in a way that his presence might hamper. You understand, dear Mrs. Hammersmith. I know you do, for your sensitive soul comprehends every shade of feeling."

Mrs. Hammersmith hastened away to explain to anxious questioners why the idol was not on his proper pedestal; and after the usual preliminaries, the reading began. Mrs. Herndon listened patiently to the exposition of "What is Truth in Decorative Art?"—truth proving to be the faithful carrying out of Mr. Chichester Kirk's designs for picture-frames and chairs, and his schemes of coloring for wall and ceiling. Mrs. Herndon smiled faintly as the familiar phrases rolled out in Mrs. Chichester Kirk's deepest and most impressive tones: "Simplicity,

truthfulness, honesty, — these are the key-notes of the new departure; a return to the earlier day when all was simple, true, and honest, and furniture and house alike were the expression of noble thought, untainted by modern degeneracy, untouched by modern Philistinism. I appeal to you, dear friends," — and here the reader's voice became more impressive, — "I appeal to you to set the seal on this return to the simple truth which we alone prize at its highest. I appeal to you; let this religion of the Beautiful, this passion of devotion to Art, work in you and make your lives an emanation of its principles. What higher aim, what nobler goal to strive toward, than the perpetuation of harmonious lines, of all that constitutes art, whether decorative or applied? As an organization our purpose as Ultimates is one: the final enfranchisement from low ideals; the regeneration of the age through the real savior of enlightened man, — Art, in its ultimate development, when the poorest shall return to the wisdom of the past, and even the cottage kitchen rejoice in the same lines from which was born the sense of the beautiful in the child of ancient Greece."

Mrs. Chichester Kirk laid down her manuscript, and fanned herself agitatedly as a gentle murmur of applause sounded from the admiring listeners about her. Her eyes had gone at once to the corner where Mrs. Herndon sat, and she smiled approvingly as she saw that her hands also had met in the barely suggested sign of approval, any more positive demonstration of which was forbidden by the principles of the Club. The President roused himself from the long abstraction he had learned to hide by a plea of tired eyes, and a retirement behind the slender hand that had covered them during the reading. His face was a strikingly noble one, lined with thought, but with curiously light eyes, cold and clear, and contradicting

the courteous smile the mouth bestowed on all who approached him. They could be kind, but few knew it; and for the many he was simply a New England Brahmin, — family, fortune, and bearing all being of the order naturally belonging to one who, nominally a radical in thought, was wedded to every conservative outward form of social life.

The groups had risen, and new combinations were taking place. Mrs. Herndon was near him; and as he also rose their eyes met for a moment, — hers full of an imperative, almost beseeching questioning, lost instantly in the indifference which fell like a veil as his own, also off guard for a moment, betrayed the human interest, the answering sympathy, forbidden by every law of the life best known to both. Mrs. Herndon smiled again, — the bitter-sweet little smile that might mean much or nothing, and that gave her the reputation of being one of the most sarcastic members of the Club. Mr. Chichester Kirk had appeared, having lingered discreetly in the hall till the first moments of congratulation were over, and in his train followed one or two of the artists whose fame he was said to have made, and with whom he had been dining. He was an extremely blond person, his pale yellow, carefully kept beard sweeping nearly to his waist, and hair and eyes and skin being merely variations of the prevailing yellow.

"A nocturne in taffy," a profane member of the Club had once called him, and her title held more truth than she knew; for, sweet as manner and words might be, it was a transitory sweetness, and he disagreed seriously with every one who came in his way.

Mrs Herndon turned toward the door. There was no reason why she should stay longer. There was nothing new to say, and no desirable rearrangement of old platitudes presented itself. She sighed almost

inaudibly a little impatient sigh; but a pair of quick ears had heard it, and their owner, who had been hidden from her by a stand of tall plants, turned at once with a flash of merriment in his keen gray eyes. He looked about cautiously as he spoke.

"Nobody can hear," he said. "Confess — if the pressure has left you power enough to confess anything — that you are bored almost to extinction, and want to go home."

"What! From a spot where all is so purely and truly natural, elevating, inspiring?"

"Even so. From a spot where not a soul will tell the truth except myself; not even you, from whom I expected it, and where the last note struck seems always a little more false than the preceding one."

"Cultivate your ear for harmony, Dr. Strothers, and you will find there is less jangle than you think."

"Certainly. Where all the notes are false, there comes to be at last a scale which has a harmony of its own. I will not mar it by adding my contribution longer."

Dr. Strothers had flushed slightly, and his eyes searched Mrs. Herndon's face as she spoke. There was an answering change in her own.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "You deserve a fair answer; for we have come, I think, to somewhat the same conclusion. Do you know what I am doing? I am saying a final good-night to the Ultimates, and though I know nothing better, purpose hereafter to take my chances alone."

"Dear Mrs. Herndon," said Mrs. Hammersmith, suddenly approaching her. "You are so interested in antiques, and you see how impossible it is for me to do any one justice. Pray take Dr. Strothers into the library, and let him examine with you the third tray in Mr. Hammersmith's ebony cabinet. You know them all, and I want that Dr. Strothers should

have the benefit of your familiarity, — so astonishing, you know, in so young a person," she added, with a touch of her fan on Dr. Strothers's arm as she fluttered away.

Mrs. Herndon led the way silently, drew out the tray from the cabinet, and placed it on the library table, seating herself before it with a business-like manner which dropped suddenly as she met the subdued smile on Dr. Strothers's face.

"There they are," she said, "and we can talk about them if you like."

Dr. Strothers leaned back in his chair, his eyes fixed for a moment on a more than usually hideous Chinese dragon grinning from a cabinet. He was a new-comer in the Club; a man much sought after in both fashionable and literary circles, disdaining popularity, interested chiefly in his profession and in scientific studies bearing upon it.

Within a few months his reputation had widened through a little book on "Brain and Mind" which had attracted wide attention, not only among his own profession, but among all speculative thinkers. The Club felt the necessity of adding a name of such distinction to its list of members, and labored assiduously to this end, securing it at last, only to find that its owner was singularly indifferent to the topics they found of most vital interest. Only perfect self-possession preserved him from being phenomenally awkward; for he stumbled over his own feet and tangled himself in his long arms in a way that distracted the sympathetic observer, — always, however, emerging calmly from the difficulty of the moment, and going on as if nothing had happened. His face was half hidden in a silky red-brown beard, and only a gleam of white teeth showed now and then under the heavy mustache. A wonderful mane of waving hair, a trifle deeper in tint, swept back from a forehead rather

broad and full than high, and keen gray eyes looked out from under well-marked brows. It was a slightly abstracted face, but lighted up with a glancing humor that showed itself with small respect of persons, and a glint of which had in the beginning attracted Mrs. Herndon's indifferent attention. All scientific people she had found, thus far, much alike; dogmatic and determined to convince, or dogmatic and distrustful of any power of comprehension in the common mind. This man, however, ignored science altogether, and talked like a big baby, simply yet enthusiastically, with that half-surprised glint of amusement in his eyes at the various phases of indifferentism or superciliousness in the responses made him. The Club flocked about him, and he studied the Club calmly, as if he had them under the slide of his microscope, and with now and then a look in which amusement had its touch of something almost like pain.

Mrs. Herndon had met him occasionally in the last year or so, and always with that half-sense of previous knowledge. The name suggested nothing; yet involuntarily she studied the face, seeking some clew to the always elusive fact that at some period in her life it had been familiar. To-night the impression was stronger than ever. She bent forward slightly. An instant more and the thin veil between her and recognition would fall, and certainty take the place of this tantalizing, persistent question. As she looked, Dr. Strothers turned, started slightly, and returned the look intently; then, passing his hand across his eyes as if to brush away some obstruction, —

"I beg your pardon," he said, the puzzled expression still on his face. "Your eyes are like a pair I never saw but once, and always meant to see again. I never forgot the clear, inquiring directness of the girl's look, yet she was horribly frightened."

"It can't be possible," Mrs. Herndon said, half

rising, then sank back with a smile. How stupid not to have remembered at once where she had seen that mane of red-brown hair! "Yes, she was horribly frightened," she continued quietly, "and the corn-house was exceedingly musty and unpleasant, but it all ended like everything else. You never came back; and that is quite consistent, too. Nothing ever does come back just as one expects it. Really —"

Dr. Strothers had risen with a bound, and was shaking hands with an ardor that seemed unable to spend itself.

"And to think how I tried to find out about you!" he said, looking at her with a scrutiny too straightforward to confuse or offend. "If Uncle Hartley had not died while I was in Germany, I should have known; but do what I would, I could get no clew. You went abroad just before I got back, for I went to Byington to see if you were there; and that was all I could learn, for Miss Lyman was with you, and I think the housekeeper distrusted me thoroughly. And so you are Mrs. Herndon? I never dreamed of that. I knew you must have married, but somehow always left you abroad. I see the old woman this moment, stealing along the fence. What became of her?"

"I cannot tell. I lost sight of them all, and have never been able to regain it."

They had settled again into their chairs, and Dr. Strothers looked at her with a frank pleasure that held a curious charm.

"We will talk about that when I come to see you, if you will allow me that pleasure," he said. "I know your at-home day, and a woman of society — that is what you are, I believe — has no evenings. Find one somewhere, please, and let me have it. Now, I want questions of another sort answered. Is it allowable to ask what you are doing just here? You have

the same eyes, I see, and they do not strike me as Ultimate eyes. Why are you one of them?"

Eminently unconventional as Dr. Strothers's demands were, they were so evidently those of a man with no time to waste, and accustomed to go directly to the point, that Mrs. Herndon met them unhesitatingly. There was a singular simplicity and directness in every look and word; a sense that outward guise counted nothing till inward fact had proved its right to existence. Shams fell away, and such truth as life had brought or left in the souls of men and women with whom he dealt answered this man, whose life's aim was truth, and who had learned his lessons among the same hills that Margaret's quiet girlhood had known. Something strong and steady looked out from the eyes, bent upon her now with an inquiry so keen yet so kindly, that she felt herself weighed and measured, and in her inmost mind answered, "Wanting."

"Why are you one of them?" he repeated.

"Because the names it held represented the best I have ever known, and I believed it would give me all I have ever wanted of man or woman. Why are you?"

"I am not sure that I know altogether. To satisfy Mr. Featherstone, I think, whom I value, and who urged it. Then several of them came after me, after the book appeared, affirming that my views were a most fascinating union of science and art, that this was my true place, and that I must join them and aid in their beneficent labors. Both propositions struck me as novel, but I have not lost all my illusions. These names mean work, and the work of poets, artists, thinkers, who write now and then as if they really believed and meant something. I am certain that somewhere under the shell human hearts are beating, human souls living the life of all souls.

But they are spirits in prison, and I cannot deliver them. Do you too find it so? or, knowing them better, perhaps, do you get what you want?"

Mrs. Herndon's lips were compressed as if with pain, and her look had darkened as he spoke.

"It would break one's heart, if hearts were in order any longer," she said. "It is certain that there are some here who hoped as much from the Club as Mr. Featherstone himself. I know that the indifferentism of his congregation had brought him to a species of desperation. They were all so charmingly developed, such thoroughly rounded spheres, that naturally close contact was out of the question, and the building of any social structure a foregone impossibility. The only union was in admiration for him. A strong faith in anything might have served as cement. But you see he has not the slightest certainty as to what he believes himself. He is a glorious thinker; but he gives you one phase one Sunday, and another another, and represents to his people whatever each may choose for his own cult. He organized the Club with a feeling that the best among his flock might come to an understanding, and cease to be merely ethical entities. I believe it too. He has been my teacher. His power is enormous. You know him?"

"Yes, and reverence his single-mindedness and his power too. Well?"

"You want to know it all. I wish it were a better story. Do you know, when my card of admission to membership was received, I read it with a sort of solemn joy. In such an organization seemed the end of limitation; the beginning of something that had constantly eluded me since life in this great hive began. I am said to have no reverence. On the contrary, my bump of veneration is not a bump at all; it is a knob, and has let me into difficulties ever since

I could spell Phrenology and define Veneration. A succession of idols have proved chiefly clay, and only a head of gold now and then has kept me constant to my early faith. But if all they told me was to be believed, here at last was something better than I had known. The 'thrill,' lost since my early youth, actually made itself felt once more as I read the card of notification — you know it?"

"And very nearly thrilled when my own came: 'You are hereby informed that your name having been proposed by the Rev. Cyrenius Featherstone, and seconded by Mr. Chichester Kirk, you are from henceforth a member of the Club of the Ultimates. Annual dues, ——. The next meeting will be, etc., etc.' Oh, yes! it was a fine moment."

Mrs. Herndon looked critically at Dr. Strothers. He was quiet, serious, attentive.

"Well, I had faith," she went on, as if impelled by some power quite outside herself. "Society had been horribly disappointed. Perhaps I expected too much. In any case, I looked to this to wipe out all uncomfortable impressions. Here culture would not have murdered simplicity; petty comment, fierce criticism, were never heard. Sets and cliques had lost their power; too aggressive personalities had rubbed down their angles, and all that life and thought had brought to all would be shared with every one who sought the gift. I held to my faith for three months. I refused to answer the interior questions that from meeting to meeting arose. Then came an evening when common sense spoke, and all the louder because I had long refused to hear. Ah, that evening! I saw a poet visibly strangling in the fuming incense burned before him by a knot of ecstatic worshippers; two historians wrangling loudly over some disputed point; a row of petty poets, novelists, good and bad, and essayists galore, and scattered among them the critics

triumphantly eying their victims, who sat, outwardly calm, inwardly deeply distrustful. And in the outer circle men and women, ambitious, discontented, uncomfortable, burning for individual recognition, and too eager for that to know that their allegiance was to a king whose title is plain, — Literary Snob. Think of it! Threescore men and women, almost all past their first youth, and many of them with kindly faces, yet all so dominated by the evil spirit that reigns here, all so bent on saying some sharp thing worthy of being handed down as a Club aphorism, that all natural speech and thought died once for all in this rarefied and breathless atmosphere of criticism and culture. Oh, I know what you would say! You think I should have been strong enough to make my own atmosphere. How could I? What is one among so many?" Mrs. Herndon paused a moment, and sat silent. Dr. Strothers watched her intently.

"Well?" he said quietly, at last; and she roused herself with an effort and went on, with her eyes fixed on the grinning dragon near them.

"And then I lost my standing permanently on an evening when somebody read a paper on 'The Love of Cleopatra,' a wild tissue of ineffable and high-toned nonsense. 'Most delightful, was it not?' Mr. Chichester Kirk said to me, and I said, 'No, not in the least. It was false and stilted and vulgar, and with no more of the man's real thought in it than there has been in all the other papers. I came here because I wanted something you profess to give. I have never heard one word that touched a need of any sort. Your culture is very fine, very delicate; but its edge is keen as a Damascus blade, and though you do not know it, your life is gone. You have no place among the living. You are ghosts, and this speech you call profound is mere squeaking and gibbering. Let me go before I too walk about with brain cut loose from

body, and waiting only a severe enough jolt to show me my real state!' 'I have heard of Mrs. Herndon's moods,' he said, 'but hardly know why I am honored by sharing in one of them.' He smiled very sweetly; but he has never forgotten, nor have I. I ought to have gone then, but I stayed on from habit. To-day I have seen something that ends any doubt. The Ultimates are a sham, and a sham doubly shameful in that they claim to represent the best that the nineteenth century has for us in America. Perhaps I have asked too much, — far too much for one who can give so little in return. In any case I ask no more. From to-night I will take my chances with every-day people, content to accept some things as they are. If I have assimilated ultimate principles till I believe nothing, feel nothing, care for nothing, I can at least abstain from the unending analysis, the wretched criticism that goes straight to the weak spot in any system of thought or personality, and ignores whatever strength or beauty or value it may own. It is killing all natural life. It shall not kill mine!"

Mrs. Herndon had risen as she spoke the last words. Her voice was low, but very clear. Her pale face glowed, and defiance looked out from her clear eyes. Dr. Strothers had risen also; and the two stood facing each other, unconscious that various eyes had turned toward them from the back parlor, in which a knot of talkers had gathered about some sketches brought in by one of the late comers.

"On the war-path again," one of them said, with a look of admiration at the graceful figure in its unobtrusive yet stately dress of dark blue velvet. "I wish she would consent to be painted, but not even Faulkner himself can bring that about. I'd like to understand the mixture of indifference and vehemence that make up her atmosphere. What's Herndon like? He never shows."

"Lower, my boy," Mr. Chichester Kirk said warningly. "Keep your questions for some other time. He does n't go in for this sort of thing; but he gives capital dinners, and has a fair notion of a picture. Strothers and he might almost be brothers, except that where Herndon is flabby and shows signs of going too fast, Strothers is compact and cool. Really, I would n't object to trusting that man. Too loose-jointed, but what a head and shoulders!"

"Too demonstrative," said Mr. J. B. P. H. Hurst, languidly. "That hearty sort of way don't do, you know. Plebeian. Nobody knows where he came from, they say."

"I beg your pardon," Mrs. Hammersmith interrupted. "With your wide acquaintance you must know something of old Judge Fainall, — the Supreme Court, you know, — his mother's father. His father was a sea-captain — the merchant service, or something of that sort — and lost at sea when the son was a mere baby."

"Ah," Mr. Hurst said indifferently. "That accounts for the manner, then, — sailor heartiness, and all that sort of thing."

The group had moved toward the front parlor, and stood now near the arch divided from the next room by heavy curtains.

"This way you all have of talking over everybody before their very face and eyes ought to be stopped," said Mrs. Hammersmith, with more energy than usual. "It 's positively dangerous. Suppose they should hear! You would n't do it at a private entertainment, and why should we forget good manners at a partly public one?"

"I 'm quite unable to say, my dear madam," returned Mr. Hurst, affably, not at all disconcerted by the attack.

"Analysis is the first condition of progress," said

Miss Lander, oracularly. "I am sure you feel it so, dear Mr. Featherstone. And the comment, the summary, from an analytical and balanced mind, can hardly be called gossip. Indeed, I feel for myself that it is one of the precious privileges of this association. We live in the white light of Truth; and though her rays dazzle, they will not blind."

Mr. Featherstone smiled, — the smile in which his eyes had no part, — and bent courteously toward Miss Lander, the third in a family of five sisters, three of whom had read Greek at the age of ten, the two others being mathematical prodigies. Three were present, all with serious blue eyes, loose, fair, waving hair, attenuated figures, and a look of nervous intensity and expectation. They drew nearer as they saw that Mr. Featherstone was speaking, and stood in a solemn row, the long, slim hands clasped before them, and their delicate faces flushing slightly with interest. Mr. Chichester Kirk, in the mean time, had been looking attentively at Dr. Strothers, who was speaking rapidly.

"The Fainalls were all dark," he said. "I knew them all. He seems to be a compromise. That square chin was never owned by any Fainall; but the brow is like the old Judge, though with none of that pinching in at the temples that the grandfather had. The new blood has done no harm, though —"

There was a little stir in the hall. The speaker frowned slightly; Mrs. Hammersmith fluttered out to see what caused the disturbance, and at the same moment Mrs. Herndon came in from the library and paused to glance at the sketches left upon the table. Mr. Hammersmith slid toward her; a little man, so excessively thin and dark as to seem hardly more than a wandering silhouette, endowed with a voice as thin and sharp as his outlines, and absorbed in his coins and the study of Schopenhauer.

"It is my serious loss that I did not know you were inspecting the last additions to my collection," he said. "Pray tell me your opinion of that head of Caligula on the smallest gold coin."

Mrs. Herndon looked at him vaguely, with an effort to recall what had lain in the tray before her, The words Dr. Strothers had said still rung in her ears, and she dreaded to lose one of them.

"It is a remarkable impression," she said. "How have you chanced upon it?" but as she stood, attentive and silent, she heard again the steady, quiet voice.

"Yes, it is a sham," he had said, and his eyes kindled as he spoke, — "it is a sham; but there is real life, notwithstanding. You can live it. You have work to do. There are thoughts and energies that are immortal. Live and act in them."

"It is impossible. Any chance of it died long ago."

"It is not impossible. The chance never dies. In work you can find your way out; and when you have found it, it will be with you as with that life to which the secret was told. It will fare with you the same. A mystic wrote the words, but the mystics are the only ones who touch truth. This is what he said: 'He will weave no longer a spotted life of shreds and patches, but he will live with a divine unity. He will cease from what is base and frivolous in his life, and be content with all places and with any service he can render. He will calmly front the morrow in the negligency of that trust which carries God with it, and so hath already the whole future in the bottom of his heart.'"

Dr. Strothers followed her as she turned silently, with a little shake of the head; and as he paused met Mrs. Hammersmith's startled face as she beckoned to him from the hall.

"Has anything happened? How can I help you?" he said.

"It 's something terrible," she whispered. "The coachman is here, — Mrs. Herndon's coachman, — and he has a telegram from somewhere down town. Mr. Herndon has been drowned in the bay. He went off yesterday duck-shooting somewhere in the bay, — I 'm sure I don't know where; and the man says they have found his boat, upside down, but no sign of him."

One or two had paused in the hall on their way upstairs, and now Mrs. Herndon's voice came from the doorway, —

"What is it? Can I do anything?"

Mrs. Hammersmith clasped her hands in despair.

"Oh, to think that you should be the one to ask!" she said, bursting into hysterical crying.

Mrs. Herndon paled slightly, and looked at Dr. Strothers silently.

"There has been an accident," he said, "but we do not know full particulars yet. It is Mr. Herndon. The carriage is here, and there are your wraps."

He took them from Mrs. Featherstone as he spoke. Mrs. Herndon took her hand for a moment, and clung to it with an uncertain, helpless look on her face. Then, still silent, she passed down the hall toward the open door. What strange impulse moved her she could not have told; but she paused for a moment, and met the shocked glances of those who had pressed about the entrance to the parlors, with a look no one could understand, — a searching, lingering look, that questioned all, yet needed no response, — such look as a spirit might give that weighed and measured the life just passing from it. Then she turned and went down the steps, waving back Mrs. Featherstone, who had followed.

"You must not go alone," wailed Mrs. Hammersmith.

"I must," Mrs. Herndon said, looking once more with the same strange intentness at the group on the steps, then closed the door of the coupé, which in a moment rattled down the street; not, however, till Dr. Strothers, following a sudden impulse, had sprung to the seat by the coachman, leaving Mrs. Hammersmith to nod approval as she hastily re-entered the door.

VII.

MR. SAVAGE LOGAN walked pensively up Fifth Avenue, and turned down Forty-seventh Street, with the air of a man profoundly bored by many unnecessary and impertinent circumstances.

"Certainly I have never set a proper value upon funerals. They are a full stop, and mark where the page may be turned and a new paragraph begin," he said, with a flight of fancy of which he made surprised note for future use. Fancy and Mr. Logan had little in common, his most salient characteristic being extreme practicality. He was tall and thin and narrow; and iron-gray predominated in hair and close-cut whiskers, and the unmistakably English coat and trousers, — iron-gray, which gave the sense that the iron made more of his mental furnishing than any mellowness the gray might be expected to have brought. His clients had been of a nature to develop this tendency, — men who, while nominally following his guidance, speculated to the verge of a ruin they barely escaped, the excitement of the advance and retreat being half the motive for a life that even for the impassive lawyer, who watched it all, had lined his brow and planted a wonderful crop of crow's-feet about the impenetrable eyes.

Mr. Herndon had been a comfortable exception to the usual order. He had speculated, it is true, but always in an indifferent sort of fashion, that made his constant success all the more bewildering; and the profits of each venture were invested at once in Government bonds. Neither ridicule nor persuasion

could carry him beyond a certain point; and thus Mr. Logan's responsibilities had been few, and beyond the box of papers containing certain deeds and mortgages, he had small knowledge of his client's real resources. Mrs. Herndon's fortune he had been allowed to handle with carefully defined limitations. Judicious investments, and one or two of Mr. Herndon's apparently careless ventures had more than doubled it; but there he had stopped and refused to allow further experiment.

"A clean hundred thousand a year, and she is just as likely to make ducks and drakes of it," Mr. Logan almost groaned as he went up the steps and slowly rang the bell. "What it would be if we could get on the track of his, the Lord only knows."

The door had opened, and a gray-headed and discreet-looking colored man bowed as he saw who had rung.

"Ah, Simmons," the lawyer said, "there is no news. Can I see Mrs. Herndon?"

"Mrs. Longshore will come down, sir," the man answered with a disappointed look. "She said I was to let her know when you come. I was hoping, sir, there would be some signs of the body."

"It may be months before that is found," the lawyer answered. "The tide has strange freaks sometimes, and in those winding channels and the quicksands about there, there is doubt if it will ever turn up at all."

"I jest ain't able to settle down to thinkin' of Mr. Herndon that way, that's a fact," Simmons said, as he moved away. "He despised water, that's what he did, except to go duck-shootin' on, an' it's not like him to stay in it without a-comin' to the top. He's bound to come to the top, sir."

Simmons affirmed this with a solemnity that forbade any suspicion of intended facetiousness.

The lawyer half smiled at the energy of the words, then walked meditatively up and down the long drawing-room, all in white and gold, and in the dim light ghostly enough to have served as trysting-place for a host of pale shadows.

The form that entered presently had small affinity with shadows. Decorous solemnity tried in vain to look from her eyes and give the proper tone to a voice which spoke most naturally in small shrieks and staccato phrases, the inference from all being that life was a perpetual but always delightful surprise. Even as Mrs. Herbert Longshore, Sally Hobbs's mop of fair curly hair remained a mop, and, parted rakishly on one side, owned an even more aggressive expression than in the days when Miss Lyman had sought vainly to reduce it to order. She was in black, — a tribute to the solemnity of the occasion, — but a black so pervaded by jet in one form and another, and worn in such fashion, that scarlet could hardly have been more assertive or incongruous. Her eyes were still the innocent, confiding eyes that had won Margaret's heart in the beginning; and now, as then, they formed an admirable cover for the multitude of small schemes — harmless but countless — and the real shrewdness beneath. The small mouth and white little teeth confirmed the impression of childishness; and the voice, purring and cooing and drawling deliciously, in its soft tones and sudden, musical little shrieks and interjections, was a duplicate of her Southern mother's most efficient weapon in the armory transmitted to the daughter.

Mr. Logan distrusted her, unable to see that underneath her recklessness and delight in small plottings, usually in the direction of match-making, lay a loyalty and warm-heartedness that made her the most faithful of friends. The eyes perpetually making play, often unconsciously to their owner, who co-

quetted from instinct quite as fully as from intention, offended his sense of decorum; the absurd little hands, plump and dimpled, and loaded with valuable rings, were an equal offence, with their perpetual gesturing; and the sudden starts and poisings and continual changes of position fretted him unaccountably.

"I hate a woman that is all jingle and jiggle," he had said one day, in an unguarded moment, to Mr. Herndon, who made haste to repeat the statement, with his own additions and alterations, to both the friends. Margaret had made no comment; but Sally had resented it fiercely, and even now, as she came forward and met the lawyer's impassive eyes, experienced a sudden desire to rouse him from the calm which, under the circumstances, she pronounced insulting.

Mr. Logan bowed gravely as Mrs. Longshore, with the slightest of inclinations, seated herself as far from him as could well be, if any communication whatever were to be had, and waited for him to open the conversation.

"I regret," he said, after a pause, in which he seemed to be taking an inventory of every ornament upon Mrs. Longshore's small person that could either jiggle or jingle, — "I regret seriously that Mrs. Herndon is still inaccessible; but the details I wish to submit can wait."

"Not at all," Mrs. Longshore said energetically. "She wishes me to obtain from you every particular, Mr. Logan, and you will be good enough to give them in full."

Mr. Logan bowed again, with even more gravity than in the beginning, and took from an inner pocket a small package of papers.

"These she can look over at her leisure," he said, "and make an appointment for an interview when she feels equal to the strain."

The door opened at this moment, and showed a little gentleman, irreproachably dressed, his pink cheeks and small, round blond head giving him the expression of a large wax doll. An exceedingly firm chin, a pair of twinkling, merry blue eyes that on occasion showed an unexpected steadiness, and an alert and determined carriage, supplemented by a mouth with good-nature in every line, corrected any tendency to underestimate his real capacity; and Mr. Logan, who knew well precisely what material made up the somewhat puzzling organization, hastened — so far as haste could be asserted of a man whose every movement was measured — to offer his greetings.

"I'm very glad you've come, Bert," Mrs. Longshore said, making room for him by her side, and receiving with a smile the bow with which he had passed her. Young American he certainly was, in the sense of alertness and sharp business knowledge which seemed to emanate from him, but young American he certainly was not in the gentle deference that marked his manner to every woman, and to his wife above all. Supreme content with his own lot in life — with his wife, his house, his horses, his cook — was felt as distinctly as the sense that he knew a good investment even better than a good dinner, and would willingly give you any points desired.

His hands, too, were small and plump and white; and he rubbed them involuntarily as he sat down by his wife, who beamed upon him with the always fresh conviction that no city on the planet held a millionnaire with half his desirable qualities.

"Well, Logan?" he said inquiringly. "No more news, I suppose?"

"None," Mr. Logan answered suavely, with a wish that Mrs. Longshore would take herself out of the

way, which was read at once by that astute little lady, who experienced on the moment a joy in the interview by no means anticipated in the beginning. "There are no further steps to be taken. I have been down to-day, and there is nothing more to be learned. He was so in the habit of coming and going suddenly, that nobody paid much attention. It's a lonely point, with only this small hotel, and the inlet running up. He had had fair shooting the day before, and eaten one of his own ducks for supper, and he went off in the morning with no word except that he should want another that night. He wanted a *salmi*, and gave very full directions to the cook, who was called in. That is the last that any one knows, except an old boatman, who heard his gun several times, and who saw him pulling toward the second inlet at noon. He wore an old suit he kept down there; and his dressing-case, and a paper or so, and some cigars are all that were left in his room. The boat was found bottom up outside the Hook, and there is not a clew of the faintest description. You know these details as well as I. He is gone, and I may say to you privately that my opinion is — suicide."

"No!" Mr. Longshore said, astonished. "My dear Logan! The last man to dream of it! What puts that into your head?"

"Some singular facts that have come out since I went over his papers. His wife's fortune is intact. He has always prided himself on keeping it so; but his own is — nowhere. He had converted everything into bonds, and of those bonds there is no trace to be found. His box at the safe-deposit vaults is empty. I have a deed here, making over this house and its contents to his wife; and it represents a clear quarter of a million. The Foxgrove house is hers, also, free of incumbrance. Beyond this, of a

fortune which, at my last knowledge of its details, was three million and a half, there is not one dollar that can be accounted for."

Mr. Logan compressed his lips, and looked fixedly into Mr. Longshore's perplexed face.

"What is your theory?" the latter said at last.

"I have none. With a different sort of man, the inference would be plain. I should say there was a woman in the case, and that he had freed himself and saved his wife's feelings and name by a pretended death. But knowing his admiration for her, and his habits of life, that is preposterous. There is another possibility. He may have drifted out, in a fit, or something of that sort, and been picked up by an outgoing bark. In that case we shall hear."

"By Jove!" Mr. Longshore remarked, thoughtfully, and with a worried look, over which his wife pondered, "it's a miserable sensational mess. What can be done, Logan?"

"Nothing. Mrs. Herndon has her own income, one hundred thousand a year, with some odd thousands thrown in. She will not suffer. Heretofore the income has gone to her through him, and she has invested more or less of it to suit herself."

Mrs. Longshore's eyes had grown larger and larger as he spoke.

"She 's never had any income but her allowance, Mr. Logan. I know that, for we each had precisely the same."

"I beg your pardon," the lawyer answered stiffly. "Her income was and is paid quarterly to her account, and she could draw at will."

"But she never had an account," Mrs. Longshore cried. "She keeps her money always in a drawer, loose, like old letters or any other valueless thing; and I've always scolded about it."

"There is evidently misapprehension somewhere," Mr. Logan said, with one of his most exasperating smiles. "Mrs. Herndon may have her own reasons for secrecy. In any case, I leave the matter with you, Mr. Longshore. I have high admiration for Mrs. Herndon, and only trust there may be some satisfactory solution of the various mysteries." And Mr. Logan bowed himself out, leaving Mrs. Longshore to stamp her pretty foot and shake a small fist after his retreating figure.

"If I were a Doge or a Dogess," she said, "I should certainly put that man in a dungeon, even if I only kept him there fifteen minutes. But what can be done when one is only the wife of a Dodger?"

Mr. Longshore turned his eyes upon his wife with such a troubled look that her own face clouded.

"Bert! You don't really think the croaker means anything? You don't suppose — "

"No, Sally. I don't, and I won't; but I 'm afraid, all the same. Now, tell me once more. Do you *know* that Margaret has never had any of her income beyond the three thousand a year allowance?"

"Never, Bert; and, the way he insisted on her dressing, it was barely enough. She wondered why there was never any more for her own purposes. You know how she longed to give, and how helpless she was in those ways, because he demanded account of it all. He was so much older than she that she yielded, but she has rebelled more and more. No, she has never talked of it at all, — only little accidental words now and then; but don't you suppose I saw? I think she was turning to ice, — poor, darling Margaret, that was so loving! Think, Bert! — you and I, that love each other so, — what it would be if one of us stopped caring, and had reason to!" And Mrs. Longshore, with a little cry, threw herself into her husband's arms.

"Thank God, Sally, we do not need to think of such a possibility," he answered gravely, holding her close. Then, after a pause, "Dear, how is it that Margaret did not come down?"

"She was not ready, Bert. I don't mean that she was not dressed, but that she was sitting in just that curious way she has been doing almost all the time since the news came. She has hardly eaten, save as I made her, and for a little while I thought she was going to die of grief. Then I saw there was something else, — I cannot guess what; and she has been shut up a great deal in her own room, — that bare little one opening from her bedroom, where she used to model. She's planning something."

"Try and make her come down to dinner to-night, Sally. Tell her I am here, and need to see her."

Mrs. Longshore shook her head.

"I'll try, Bert; but I believe she's taken a vow, and means to do something dreadful. It is a whole week, and you'd think she would get accustomed to the thought; but she does not seem to, one particle. If she'd only talk it out! but she won't."

"Well, child, try and coax her out. It must end sometime."

Mrs. Longshore went slowly up the stairs, leaving her husband to pace up and down the drawing-room, shaking his head at intervals.

"No, no," he muttered at last. "As Logan says, he was n't that sort of man, and there is only that one circumstance that could make me dwell on it for a moment. He's speculated deeper than Logan knew, and had not the courage to own it, and face any change. Poor old Herndon! He was n't half a bad sort of fellow."

Mrs. Longshore tapped gently, then opened the door, surprised as she entered to see Margaret rise from her chair and come toward her, a faint smile

on her face, and a look of quiet resolution in her eyes.

"Poor Sally!" she said, as Mrs. Longshore ran toward her, crying.

"Oh, Margaret! how thankful I am to have you willing to stir!"

"Poor child! I have given you a hard week, and you should have gone away from me and left me to myself. It seems to me you have always been sitting outside my doors, crying a little, and waiting to be let in, as you used to at Byington, just like—"

"Like a ridiculous spaniel, without sense enough to resent anything," Mrs. Longshore said, holding Margaret's hand and looking at her with delight. "There 's nothing to resent now, you poor dear! Bert is downstairs, Margaret, and he wants so much to see you. You have dressed, have n't you? You really were going down? The fire is burning in the library. Let us go there."

Mrs. Herndon shivered a little as she crossed the threshold of her room, and looked about her for a moment as if in search of something, then descended the stairs, and put out her hand to Mr. Longshore as he came forward eagerly, his twinkling blue eyes growing grave as he saw how the week had worn upon her.

"You are so kind," she said; "but you will always be kind, Bert. I am glad you are here, for I want to talk over things a little, and you and Sally are the only ones to whom I can speak freely. I have made up my mind. I want to leave this house as soon as possible, and take a quiet little one, more in harmony with my income and my own wishes. You know this magnificence has always oppressed me, and its only use is to sell for enough, perhaps, to satisfy some of the creditors."

They had drawn their chairs around the fire, and Margaret looked around the room as she spoke, as

if, then and there, she would escape from it if she could.

"How has any impression of creditors come to you?" Mr. Longshore said. "Have you been told there were any?"

Mrs. Herndon's clear eyes met his in a surprised look.

"I supposed you knew it all, Bert. If my own fortune had not proved so much less than I had supposed it to be, there would have been less trouble."

"Will you tell me exactly, as you understand it, what the nature of the trouble is?" Mr. Longshore said, with a warning look at his wife, who had leaned forward eagerly as he spoke.

"If I can," Mrs. Herndon said. "I have been as foolish as many other women, and asked very few questions, but only ten days ago Mr. Herndon told me that he had lost nearly everything from some shrinkage in mining stocks. No; as I think of it, he implied rather than said it, but he has always been losing ever since I married him. I had urged him to take my money and use it, but he would not, and he was excessively angry if I made any effort to save from my income. He said his reputation would be lost if there were the least change in his habits. I was miserable, for the sham of it all weighed upon me so. I cannot see how I allowed it to go on a day, but I have been — I scarcely know what — so under his influence that I hardly thought an independent thought. He loved me very much," she added hastily, as if dreading any admission, "and from the beginning his will was much stronger than mine. I could not resist it, but it has seemed less and less reasonable — I mean in these matters."

"Then you have both been pressed for money?"

"Yes, in all ways in which I really wanted it. I had my dreams, you know, Sally, of what I should

do, but they have had to wait. Now I am free, and at last I see clearly. It is not too late to begin, even now. I will know just as I always meant to know, and have my life mean something if it can."

"Margaret, I am as much in the dark as you," Mr. Longshore said, rising and facing her. "What it all means the Lord only knows. The simple facts are that this house and all it contains is deeded to you free of all incumbrance, and the Foxgrove place also, — the two representing nearly half a million in value; while the income from your own fortune has been for six years over one hundred thousand a year, which you are said to have drawn at will."

Mrs. Herndon fell back in her chair for a moment, her face so pale that he sprang toward her, but she recovered herself instantly.

"There is some dreadful mistake," she said. "That is perhaps what might have been before the losses."

"There are no losses, child," Mr. Longshore said imperatively. "I am talking about your property, not about his. Of his there is not a dollar that can be accounted for. Of yours, there is precisely what I say. Do you mean that you have never known what your own income really was?"

"I knew that it was three thousand a year, and that Mr. Herndon had great difficulty in investing the principal so as to be certain of that. He had a power of attorney, and did as he pleased."

"What he pleased, then, was to use all the surplus in building this house and the one at Foxgrove. That is my conclusion on the matter. They are honestly your own, Margaret, and every article in them. Not a dollar of his has ever been put into either. What he meant — well, it is not worth while to ask what he meant. Let it go, and get all the satisfaction you can from what is yours, unquestioned."

Mrs. Herndon was silent, and her eyes had the

inscrutable look that covered all trace of her real thought. She leaned back presently, and closed them; and Mr. Longshore exchanged apprehensive looks with his wife, who shook her head as she watched the pale face.

"How many know all this?" Margaret asked, at last, rousing herself, and sitting up with the resolute look that showed some inward conclusion had been reached.

"No one but Logan and ourselves. There will be more or less talk about it, just as there has been; but the real facts need never pass beyond these four. There is a mystery to which there seems no clew; and unless Herndon himself comes back from the dead, we shall never know. It is all simply unaccountable, — unlike anything in his character that I have ever seen."

"I want you to promise me one thing," Mrs. Herndon said, after another silence, in which she had sat with her eyes fixed on the fire. "It is useless to discuss this ever again, that I can see. There are reasons that make me, as I remember some things, less and less surprised. Promise me to ask nothing more, and to accept things as they are, with no more thought of what they have been. Plans, and everything of that sort, we will talk over as much as you like; but for the past, — I am done with it. No matter what it has held. Neither you nor I can know it all. I put it away. To-night we will begin again. All the plans I had tried to make must be reconstructed on this new basis. But I am more certain than ever that this is not to be my place. I want Mr. Logan, as speedily as may be, to dispose of it; and I shall buy that house on Twenty-second Street that the Dennings lived in."

"East!" Mrs. Longshore said, with a little shrink of dismay.

"East," Mrs. Herndon repeated, with the first real smile her face had worn. "It is a good house, Sally; a generous old-fashioned one, that I like. Simmons may object, but I think he will tolerate it when he finds I really want it. You will go with me, Simmons, if I leave this house?" she asked, as he came forward to announce dinner.

"Sartin, madam," Simmons said, with a look of devotion. "I goes where you does, madam, long 's the same earth holds us; but I was hopin' you 'd come to an' enjoy your possessions here, without no tearin' up by de roots. Somethin' 's happened," he added to himself as he backed out. "Her face is all cl'ared up. Hain't seen her look so nat'ral, not since she come here. 'T would n't be respectable not to be pale and heavy round de eyes like she is, the blessed angel; but there 's somethin' kind o' peart, an' as if she was beginnin' to take notice ag'in. That long white dress ain't just the thing; but long 's she would n't rouse up ter be measured for black ones, I reckon it was de best she could do."

The three talked quietly as dinner went on. Whatever might be Mr. Longshore's private consternation or speculations, he gave no further sign, but ate his dinner with good appetite, in the mean time discussing various small social items; while Simmons hovered devotedly about his mistress, his Southern birth and training allowing a certain freedom he would permit in no other servant.

"She 's de livin' image of Miss Lucy Pendleton, de oldest o' de seven young ladies that I toted on my shoulder, every one; an' she hain't any o' your Northern ways o' lookin', but is jist as easy an' swimmin'-like, when she moves, as real ladies is in Virginny. Take your bref away to see 'em sometimes."

"You must go straight home, Bert," Mrs. Longshore

said, as they passed into the library again. "I want Margaret to go upstairs directly, for she is very tired."

"You must go with him to-night, Sally," Mrs. Herndon said. "Yes," as Mrs. Longshore made a deprecatory gesture, "I have come to myself, and you need not worry any longer. I would very much rather have things return to their usual course; only you know how glad I shall be to see you in the morning."

Mrs. Longshore looked at her for a moment as if to see how far the words were meant, and followed her, half mutinously, up the stairs.

"It does n't seem right," she said; "but you always will do as you like, Margaret."

An almost inaudible sigh was the only answer as Mrs. Herndon watched the pretty figure settling her bonnet-strings with as many little touches and flirts as a bird preening itself; and a look of deep relief was on her face as the door finally closed, and for the first time since this strange week began she found herself alone.

"I shall not want you to-night, Rosa," she had said to her maid, who waited for her in the dressing-room; and now she drew a low chair before the fire, and sat there gazing intently into the flickering flame. Pale and worn as she was, Simmons was right; and her face wore the look of her girlhood, — eager, expectant, almost happy.

Till to-night each day of the weary week had been filled with dreary questionings, and with less and less power to solve them. Over and over the eight years of her married life opened out before her, from the moment when, in that sheltered corner of the Jardin des Plantes, the handsome head of William Herndon had bent before her as Mrs. Borie had presented him to her. He was older than she had expected, for many of the people she met in this

winter in Paris sounded his praises till she wondered what there could be about him to stir so many varying minds. Even Mrs. Borie, watchful and suspicious for her charge, confided to her by Miss Lyman, looked with deepest interest at this elegant bachelor, who had spent fabulous sums on pictures, and whose reputation was that of courteous indifference toward every woman.

There were signs that to experienced eyes told a story which needs no outlining beyond the words: he knew to the full all that Paris had for him. But to Margaret, who cared nothing for young men, and detested most of the Parisians she had met, he was not only the handsomest man she had ever seen, but proved himself shortly the most fascinating; and she found herself pouring out, not only all the very distinct opinions she had already formed, but her dreams as well. For a month she saw him daily, forgetting long before it ended that he was a day older than herself. Her life had passed almost solely with her own sex. She had many theories of what men should be, and experienced profound dissatisfaction in finding them not in the least what she had expected. This man of forty-two, assured and calm in bearing, polished and courteous and deferential as a knight on probation, dwarfed every other aspirant, and filled her with an eager admiration that passed insensibly into something deeper. His knowledge seemed so broad and comprehensive, his taste so delicate and sure, that to listen to him was in itself an education. He drew her out as no one had ever done; and as the clear eyes kindled, and her face seemed illuminated from some deep inward source, he yielded to the spell, and for the time forgot that any other had ever moved him.

To Margaret supreme content had come. She asked no questions, thought of no future, but rested

in this satisfying present, heart and soul blossoming into perfect flower under this rare sunshine of love and hope and understanding.

There was no surprise, only a deeper content, when at last, on a morning in that same corner of the Jardin des Plantes where they had first met, and to which he led her now silently, and with a significance she could hardly fail to understand, "I love you, Margaret," he had said, after he had seated her and stood for a moment looking down on the drooping head. "Are you willing to be my wife?"

Margaret looked up at him, — a look so worshipful and tender that for an instant the man's eyes fell, and a faint pang of remorse made itself felt. What right had he to this exquisite innocent devotion and faith?

"My dear one, I am unworthy to take this hand," he said, with a humility lost an instant later in the delight of knowing she was securely his; and Margaret, as they presently joined Mrs. Borie, who had remained discreetly at a distance till the momentous words should be spoken, felt that life could never give a more wonderful or satisfying moment. Margaret was so peculiar, it was almost impossible to tell how she would act; and Mrs. Borie glowed with satisfaction as she saw that further uncertainty had ended.

At nineteen Margaret was the same compound of self-distrust and audacity that had made her, as a child, utterly incomprehensible to Madam Coolidge, who looked at her with an indignant wonder that in the old Squire was simply passive acceptance of her as an unaccountable fact. For both of them wonder and indignation were over at last, and the year or two of life in a country where all puzzles are made plain may have brought regrets that their sojourn below had never known. Margaret had mourned her

grandfather a good deal, and reproached herself that not one tear would come for her grandmother, who had meant to be kind, but never really cared. Randy remained, and dwelt in a wing of the old house, keeping everything in such scrupulous order as befitted anything belonging to that blessed child, and waiting longingly for the day when she would return to it.

Then the year abroad had been planned, and before it ended Randy, too, was gone, and Margaret wept bitterly as she wondered how she could have left without one day, at least, with this faithful, tender old friend. She was strangely alone, and, kind as friends might be, felt it more and more. It was small wonder, then, that she yielded speedily to an influence heretofore an almost unconsidered factor. There was no one to care particularly, save Miss Lyman; and Margaret made no opposition to Mr. Herndon's wish for a speedy marriage, and in another month entered on the new life, with a faith and fervor that might almost have assured the certainty of what she dreamed. A few months longer abroad, wandering happily from point to point that she had most desired to see, and consenting to more ceremony and show in daily life than she had ever before tolerated, and they were at home, in the gorgeous house, — its magnificent appointments, in the highest taste of the day, weighing upon Margaret more and more. Devotion did not slacken; nay, it even increased. She was never alone. Every thought and act were under inspection, — tender, admiring, or with chiding of the gentlest, but always inquired into. They rode and walked and drove together, and society pronounced them a model couple; but as time went on, Margaret came to understand that this love, beautiful as many of its manifestations were, was the supremest, most incredible selfishness. Theorize as he

might, his real interests were bounded by himself; and deep resentment filled him as he found his influence waning, and met Margaret's clear eyes filled with astonished reproach and question. Old faiths had fallen from her. All that she had longed to do was a vain dream. All about, the hard-working, starved, empty lives of men and women were going on, but her hand could never be stretched out to aid or cheer.

And as she changed, a silent inward repulsion growing in her, against which she strove with all her strength, there was a change also in him. He loved her, — there was never doubt of that, — but he watched her unceasingly; and there were moments when she gasped and longed wildly for a full, free breath.

She had done her best. There were a thousand complications; sudden suspicions, a strange sense of growing absorption in interests she was not allowed to share, even while his vigilance over herself never relaxed, till, in despair, she had sought refuge in a broad social life, in every form allowed her. Loyal in every fibre, it was impossible to discuss him. Perhaps she herself was somehow wrong. In any case, only time could help. There were strange doings in these latter months; hours in which she urged him vainly to tell her the truth, and ended only when she saw the silent, fixed resistance in his eyes. What it was she could not guess; and to-night she put it from her, and turned at last to such future as opened before her.

"I will write to my dear old cousin Marcia," she thought at last. "If she and Cousin Erminia will come to me for the winter, I shall know better by the time it ends just what it is best to do. That I can do anything freely, ought to hold some compensation."

She shook her head as the thought came; then rose suddenly from her chair, and threw out her arms as if rejoicing to feel herself once more her own.

"He is gone!" she said. "I have thought it all through. If he were here, I should say, 'Forgive me where I failed, as fully as I forgive you,' and that would end it. For myself faith and hope are dead, but there are others still. I can work for them. O Father, — if there be truly any Father of all, — guide me, and let me carry help to hearts that are heavier than mine! I will help. That is all that is left for me."

VIII.

MISS MARCIA was a little late, and looked suspiciously at the clock as she came in, — a highly decorated black-and-gold affair, set high between four inadequate alabaster pillars, also lined with black and gold, and crowned by a flying Cupid. Captain John, the father of young John, had himself selected it on his first voyage to Bordeaux and a consequent hasty visit to Paris, and had labored earnestly during the long return voyage to make it keep the same time two days together.

"It is the most convincing demonstration I have ever had," he said, as he presented it to Miss Lucia, "of the angel's statement that time shall be no more."

Miss Lucia felt that this was too irreverent to deserve reply; but she set the clock in the place from which it had never since been removed, and looked gratefully at this cousin who had remembered each of them. She had sighed, too, but so lightly that Captain John never heard it, though what the sigh had meant became plain as years went on. Like other Adams since time began, Captain John had "seated himself in the mail-coach with the full persuasion that in the cities for which he was booked quite different and more Madonnas stood at the doors of the houses than in his cursed one;" and his selection of a wife was made far from Deepmouth, and regardless of Deepmouth claims. It happened, likewise, in equal order, that "the young men of those

cities, who again, on their part, took passage in the arriving stage-coach, and came riding hopefully into his," found Miss Lucia inaccessible and immovable, and, plead as they might, left her none the less resolved to be Miss Lucia to the end. The clock held its place in the old dining-room, contradicting audaciously the regular and unvarying statements of the great clock on the landing, and put forward or put back, as the case demanded, — the one defiant protest against New England accuracy and New England routine.

Captain John brought back his bride, and settled next door to the old house. Young John in time appeared, and grew up under the occasional admiring supervision of his sailor father, who knew his home rather by remembrance than experience; and the quiet mother found companionship in the three sisters, whom her boy also called Cousin Lucia and Marcia and Erminia. With each year, as young John grew, and Miss Lucia's hair slowly whitened, Captain John announced that he should retire after the next voyage. Miss Lucia smiled, and said she hoped so. He had long passed his first youth when he married, and was now almost an old man; and young John, who had entered the Naval Academy, had graduated, and made more than one cruise, before Captain John made good his words. His last voyage had come, but it ended in a port from whence the sailors do not return; and it was not unnatural that the wife, who always pined without him, followed soon, to know, if might be, the same secret that had kept him from her. Young John came and went in the old house, now that his own had no mistress, Miss Lucia looking upon him as in some sort her own. It was in these days that young Margaret Coolidge came to them for the visit her father had long promised, and that Madam Coolidge had always

opposed, and Miss Lucia had said to herself that here was the wife for John. As matters go, John should have failed to be of the same mind, and thwarted his elders with the promptitude to which they become accustomed. On the contrary, he fell in love instantly, and conducted his courtship with a sailor's promptness. Miss Lucia was a little confounded at the suddenness of it all, but made no reproaches on the day we know, when the pair appeared before her, and announced what the morning and Parson Adams had brought about.

"The child shall stay with us, John," she had said; and though her hands trembled a little, she went on knitting placidly. Of course this was all very rash, but she would write to Madam Coolidge herself. It had all happened as she wished, after all. Sailors were sailors; and the Deepmouth people, who might be inclined to shake their heads, should remember it. They did remember it, and condoned the offence with surprising good-nature; and they remembered it still and shook them again when the news came that young John would return no more, and that the baby Margaret at Edgeton was not only fatherless but motherless. "The Wentworths are dying out," they said; "nothing but women-folks left."

Miss Lucia made no complaint, but she faded slowly away. To the last she went through the accustomed routine, now and then charging Miss Marcia and Miss Erminia never to lose sight of the child Margaret, but to have her with them whenever it was allowed.

Madam Coolidge's resentment, unspoken but strong, had stood in the way of this. It was through their folly that she must again take up this burden of care and see another child on its way to womanhood; and she never forgot nor forgave.

It was Randy who told the little Margaret all that

the elder Margaret had confided to her, and so described the house at Deepmouth that it seemed as real as her own home. Letters came now and then, and Margaret, as she grew older, answered them; the Squire in this point withstanding his wife, who would, if possible, have forbidden all communication.

With the ending of her school life, and after their death, before the year abroad had been decided upon, came a month in the old mansion, where Miss Marcia and Miss Erminia filled as they best might the great rooms, once so alive, in which nothing had changed but the inhabitants. Many Wentworths had sailed out from Deepmouth and brought back strange tribute. African idols grinned at Chinese dragons, and South Sea spears lay harmlessly by Moorish scimitars and strange East Indian arms. Naturally, the old houses in the little seaport had become museums, and remained so even when moth invaded thick Eastern stuffs, and rust ate slowly into brass and steel and bronze. But it was contrary to all New England traditions to throw anything away. Miss Marcia was practical, but she was also reverential, the latter quality predominating and showing itself most largely in respect for all family traditions. Miss Lucia had kept everything in the same order as her mother before her, and Miss Marcia desired nothing better; and thus she withstood, mildly but inflexibly, Miss Erminia's desire for change. Erminia was the youngest, and less a Wentworth than any of the family had ever been. She preferred the new to the old, and accepted the latest theory of anything as necessarily the best. Miss Marcia seldom opposed her; but there were moments in which sudden revolt came, and Miss Erminia realized that experiment might better cease.

Margaret watched them both, a little in awe of Miss Marcia, who never leaned back in her chair,

and whose fingers were always busy, usually in "pegging" mittens for her shoals of needy poor.

In a day or two this all passed. How it was, Margaret hardly knew; but the fact remained, and she quickly came to think of this as a spot that might be called home, more really than anything she had ever owned. Here were people who had known her father and his father, — too dim a personality to be called grandfather, — and who, as she met them, looked at her with kind, inquiring eyes, and said she had the Wentworth look, and was her father over again except the eyes. Love Edgeton and the mountain and Randy as she might, this was her real place; and it was the sharpest of wrenches to leave them all, even for that year abroad for which she had longed. She brought her husband here in those early days after her return, and planned then for summers in the quiet town. There were frequent letters at first, and always some word of this hope. Then the number lessened, and at last came a long silence.

"She has forgotten us. She never really cared much," said Miss Erminia, who read the society column of the "Tribune," and saw how more and more Mrs. William Herndon was mentioned as a leader in this or that festivity.

"She has n't forgotten, and she never will," Miss Marcia said, with a compression of the lips that meant far more than she would say. Miss Erminia always looked at her fixedly and inquiringly after this statement was made; but Miss Marcia was impenetrable, and whatever she suspected, said nothing. They lived their own lives in a routine which till lately had been unchanging. They spent a month in Boston in the winter, and another month at the Springs in the summer, — Sharon usually, as most in accord with Deepmouth convictions as to what was proper recreation, — meeting the same set

from year to year, and knowing the passage of time only by the imperceptible transformation that suddenly showed the children as young men and women.

Of late, Miss Erminia had rejected the Springs, and gave her month to one and another "hygienic" resort. She had always been delicate, and had given her early years to patient trying of approved medicines, her collection of bottles rivalling Mrs. Poyser's. The results would seem to have been favorable. She was tall and fair and plump; limp as a rag doll when one was least prepared for it, and owning a robust appetite and profound appreciation of the celebrated Wentworth formulas in cookery. Miss Marcia was small and dark and erect, with a deep disdain of all self-indulgence, and an equal indifference to table pleasures. In spite of this very apparent fact, Miss Erminia took the ground that the elaborate three meals daily were a concession to Miss Marcia's fixed habits, and that she herself was singularly exempt from weakness of this nature. Miss Marcia smiled a little grimly, but said nothing. Erminia was a good soul; and if this fiction comforted her, by all means let it be kept up. But even Miss Marcia revolted when, after a longer absence than usual, Miss Erminia returned, bent upon eliminating from their food all that had ever given it desirability or distinctive character. Salt and pepper and spice, butter and eggs and cream,—all her dearest delights, she turned from with a resolution before which Miss Marcia and old Dilly stood confounded. For the time being, Miss Erminia abolished herself. A stranger sat in her place, and packed and steamed, walked and ate and drank, after the newest theories of the school on a hill-top to which she had ascended with others, and on which she elected to remain, in soul, if not in person.

"Don't you fret," old Dilly had said to Miss Marcia after a week or two, in which Miss Erminia stirred up her own coarse flour and water into unleavened bread, guiltless of salt, and eaten with a relish so well simulated as to do infinite credit to her powers of self-beguilement. "Don't you say a word, an' it 'll wear itself out quick enough. 'T ain't the first time she 's set out to have the whole family on the same hobby-horse she was on, and got down sudden enough to send 'em all over its head. You keep still, an' wait till squash-pie time comes."

Squash-pie time had come, and Miss Marcia ate her own portion calmly without so much as a look toward Miss Erminia, who eyed it at first belligerently, then with involuntary interest, and, on its third appearance, with a sudden change of base.

"I have been considering the matter, Marcia," she said, "and there are certain points in Dr. Jackman's theory that seem to me slightly extreme. Squash is a most bland and innocent natural production; soothing, even, to the whole internal economy. Of course the additions are deleterious; but I am convinced that a small piece, the merest trifle of a piece, could not be seriously prejudicial."

"Undoubtedly not," returned Miss Marcia, seriously. "Shall I send you some?"

Miss Erminia hesitated. Why could not Miss Marcia do it without any words?

"Sunshine, of course, makes a difference," she said argumentatively. "Tubers, for instance, are not suitable human food, maturing, as they do, in the ground, and drawing from rank earth instead of air and sun. I wish you would banish them from the table, Marcia. They are an offence to the enlightened mind."

Miss Erminia had received and finished her pie, and looked longingly at the segment on the pie-plate. Marcia had been altogether too literal. She might

have sent her a trifle more, and not obliged her to suggest that more was desired.

"You certainly are the most aggravating person, Marcia," she continued with sudden irritability; "sitting there, gorging squash-pie and refusing point blank to use your common sense about anything."

"I suppose that means that the piece was too small," said Miss Marcia, unmoved.

Miss Erminia leaned back and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"You are so dreadfully unfeeling, Marcia," she said; "nobody who had n't the mildest temper in the world could get on with you."

"Then how fortunate it is that you are that body!" Miss Marcia said, depositing another fraction of pie on Miss Erminia's plate, who viewed it abstractedly for a moment as an article having no connection with any thought of hers, then attacked it as somewhat in the way and requiring to be disposed of without further words.

"I have been thinking, Marcia," she said, after the operation had ended successfully, "why must it always be Boston in the winter? There is a most delightful hotel in New York, — that is, I am told it is delightful by some most interesting people I met at Dr. Jackman's. Really, Marcia, I am sure you would find it an excellent means of development."

Miss Marcia rose hastily and left the room. She had all the development she desired, and Miss Erminia certainly grew a little more senseless every day. At her age, too, it was preposterous. Miss Marcia shut herself in her own room until tea-time, — the heaviest punishment she could inflict on Miss Erminia, who hated to be alone, but, hating equally to make calls by herself, was forced back upon a vegetarian treatise she had placed in plain sight on a table between the windows. Marcia was growing

older and more prejudiced every day; but, after all, how good she was! Miss Erminia pressed her handkerchief to her eyes again as she reflected on one and another instance of her kindness and self-sacrifice, and turned to her at last, when she appeared, with such a welcoming smile that Miss Marcia's heart smote her, and she watched the boiling of the hot-water kettle with unusual interest. Miss Erminia liked to have it boil as the water was poured on the teaspoonful of cream and sugar which she took at night, and had had occasion for reproachful remark that Miss Marcia poured it first on the tea, and obliged her to wait till a flat taste had had time to develop itself. Marcia was sorry, she knew, for her little temper, and perhaps would even yield a point, and be willing to try New York, though it might seem a little odd to be there and not go to Margaret. She did not broach the subject again, however. There was plenty of time, and it was very comfortable at home, — too comfortable. Dr. Jackman would never approve of all these appliances for making life easy. There was his treatise, too. Marcia had not opened it, and had no idea how inspiring some of the statements were. Certainly a part of the evening might be given to it. When they did not play bezique, or sixty-six, or the semi-weekly rubber of whist with old Captain Drummond and his wife, they read aloud. Miss Erminia had done this all her life. She was considered to have great gifts in this direction, and they were now going over the Waverley Novels for the third time, Miss Marcia objecting to most of the later fiction as wanting in all the characteristics of real romance. To-night she had prepared herself for the first chapter of "The Monastery," and sat down with her basketful of dark blue yarn and her pegging-hook. Miss Erminia looked at the novel regretfully, but duty was plain.

"I'll read for an hour, just as usual," she said; "but then, Marcia, I do feel that you ought to understand some of the principles of this treatise. Say that I give half an hour to that."

"Anything you like," Miss Marcia said abstractedly; and Miss Erminia, surprised at the ease of her victory, took courage and even frowned judicially as she saw Miss Marcia's preoccupied look.

"Now, don't let your attention wander, but do take in these sublime principles," she said. "See what an opening, — 'Man is a rational animal, distinguished from the lower orders of life by the possession of reason, and thus the power of choice. It is, then, eminently desirable that he should know what to choose.'"

Miss Erminia's voice rose and fell with delighted relish as the argument proceeded. She had not realized how unanswerable these propositions were. That against the use of tubers as food must certainly affect any one of any candor, and she looked up at last, surprised at the silent acquiescence, to see the treacherous Marcia, as the voice ceased, start guiltily from the most peaceful of naps.

Miss Erminia laid down the book and rose with dignity. "I did suppose, Marcia," she said, with feeling, "that a wish of mine counted for something; but as it does not, I shall bid you good-night." And she swept from the room before Miss Marcia, still dazed from the sudden detection, could remonstrate.

Thus it happened that when Captain Drummond sent in the evening mail, which he made it a point to call for with his own, Miss Marcia looked it over unquestioned. There was the "Evening Transcript," an essential in every well-regulated Deepmouth household; some circulars of one sort and another; and — yes, at last, a letter from Margaret. A year had passed without a word. There had been some books

at Christmas, with a card, "From your always affectionate Margaret," but Miss Erminia had turned the pages in vain for note or other word of remembrance. Miss Marcia sat down with the thick sheets in her hand, and grew a little pale. There had been a mystery, and at last she was to know it. She half wished that Erminia had not gone upstairs, and then reflected that it was best, and that there might be things she would not tell even her. She read at last, slowly turning back now and then to read again, and then sat looking into the fire, the open sheets lying loosely in her lap. So it had been as she had feared, and these latter years had held only miserable living, — patient endurance of inevitable grief.

"It is useless to write it all," Margaret ended, "and now that we are separated — "

"Why should she say 'separated'?" Miss Marcia had pondered. "Why does n't she say, 'Now that he is dead'? 'Now that we are separated,'" she read on, "'and I am free to act out my own desire and conviction, I want to do it in the best way. I do not intend that this first year shall hold any unnecessary comment, and so I want you to do me the greatest kindness it would be possible to ask, and come to me for the winter. Dilly and Jack will care for the house, and you will come to one almost as old for New York as yours for Deepmouth. By the time your plans are all made, I shall be settled on a quiet street, and away, once for all, from the magnificence you would love no better than I have done. Plan to get here by Christmas, and bring anything and everything that will make you feel at home. I want something that is my own near me, if only for a time. We shall not need to go over any of this forlorn story. You know now that I have not been free to act, and in what stupid ignorance I have allowed myself to be kept. That has ended and can never be again, and the method

need not be mentioned. I shall go my own way; but I know how thoroughly you believe in that, and you can help me more than you know or I can tell.'"

Miss Marcia had taken the letter upstairs and read it once more in her own room, the facts it held dancing in fantastic combination through her brain as the night wore away in troubled sleep, ending at last in quietness. She slept at last, and the breakfast-bell had rung twice before she went down, to find that Miss Erminia was late also. Jack brought in the muffins with a surprised air, and looked with interest at Miss Marcia, who, instead of sitting quietly expectant at the head of the table, was walking up and down the room, and only took her place as Miss Erminia entered. Miss Marcia was silent after good-morning had been said. She would not mention the letter till breakfast had ended; but she sat there abstractedly stirring her egg and failing to note that Miss Erminia had taken advantage of her obliviousness, and was eating buttered muffins with the utmost relish. It could not be that Marcia was sulking. Perhaps she really had hurt her feelings; and Miss Erminia paused and looked toward her apprehensively. Miss Marcia roused herself and drank her cup of coffee; then remarked, as casually as if it were a common affair, —

"I heard from Margaret last night, Erminia, and she wishes us to come and spend the winter with her in New York."

Miss Erminia was dumb. Indignation that she had been allowed to go to bed with no notification of such important news, and satisfaction at the prospect, struggled together.

"You 'll say no, of course," she found voice to say at last. "That it would suit me, I suppose, will not count at all."

"Read the letter, Erminia," Miss Marcia said

gravely, "and see if it is worth while to have any small personal feelings."

Miss Erminia bridled slightly, but curiosity was strong, and till she had read offences could wait. They had sunk out of sight long before the reading ended, and she looked up at last, with flushed face and astounded eyes.

"Why — but, Marcia, he lied and cheated, and has been a thorn in the poor child's side for six years, and she never spoke."

"Nor must we now," Miss Marcia said decisively. "Death has taken charge of that matter; and for her sake, and the family's, and everything else, we must keep still. You are always discreet and silent when you choose to be, Erminia. For Margaret's sake, you will be so now, and we will give her as cheerful a winter as we can. I know you can do a great deal toward it."

Miss Erminia glowed with pride. Marcia appreciated her better than she had thought, and should not be disappointed.

With evening Captain Drummond dropped in for a chat, and Miss Marcia answered his question, "I suppose you 'll be off to Boston by the last of the month?" as quietly as if the reply were not the upheaval of over thirty years of routine, —

"No; we go to New York instead, — to our cousin, Mrs. Herndon, — Margaret Wentworth that was."

"I know, — I know," the Captain nodded, after a pause of amazement, and presently stumped away, still confounded, but chuckling over the fact that his piece of news would be the largest contribution to the supply furnished by other reputable householders as they sat about the stove or leaned against the counter of what, through every addition to Deepmouth resources in the way of shops, still was known always as "the store." Naturally, then, by noon the next

day, all Deepmouth knew that the Wentworth programme for the winter had changed, and that, after such change, the foundations of the earth itself might be considered unstable.

. . . . . .

There were other points where Mrs. Herndon's intentions excited no less interest and comment. Mr. Longshore, armed with two brushes, between which his small blond head struggled to assert itself, emerged from his dressing-room.

"Do you know, Sally, that Logan is furious?" he began, then paused and gazed with profound admiration at his wife, who stood there in a bewildering combination of amber satin and slightly darker velvet, her crop of yellow curls, and eyes and brows but a shade deeper, carrying out an effect no one less certain of herself would have ventured upon. "See here, Sally, I 've a notion for the next costume-ball, — go as a topaz, you know. That 's what you are, sure as fate. Not much as a jewel, you know, but still they 're not bad. There 's that necklace of grandmother's that Amy set on black velvet; you could get hold of a lot more, and it would be something new."

"I wish you 'd go on about Logan's fury, instead of wasting time on expensive suggestions," Mrs. Longshore returned, after a pause in which she had considered the proposition and nodded satisfaction.

"Oh, Logan!" and Mr. Longshore sat down astride a high-backed chair and frowned over the top. "Logan really goes a little too far, you know. He thinks she is a lunatic and ought to be taken in charge after this latest proceeding."

"Nothing worse?" Mrs. Longshore said apprehensively.

"Not a thing. I say, give her head and she 'll go steady enough when she settles down to work. I 'm

not surprised, though, that Logan wants to put the curb on."

"Bert, how often have I told you that I will not allow you to talk of Margaret or anybody else as if she were one of your horses?"

"I!" returned Mr. Longshore, astonished. "I never thought of such a thing. What I mean to say is, that she has leased the house and everything in it — do you hear? everything in it — to those McPhails, who have been making no end of money in pork. They 've got sense, and show it by wanting the house as it stands; and of course Margaret has a perfect right to deprive herself of Herndon's collection if she wishes, but I 'm not surprised that Logan fumes and calls it desecration. I begin to believe she 's lost to us, Sally, buried on that East Side and all."

"And that is just where you know nothing about it, and are so like a man," Mrs. Longshore said energetically. She had settled down on a low chair, but rose now and stood before him. "I don't care what she does; she will always be just the same for us, and more so. We 're frivolous wretches, and we know it, and she knows it; but for all that, we love her and she loves us; and I have a feeling that somehow we 're really going to be with her more. I 'm sure I can't tell how. It 's a sort of presentiment, and I don't believe things are going to be just the same. But she won't really go out of the house this winter?"

"She will be out of it within a fortnight, child. The McPhails want their Christmas dinner there, and she wants hers in the new place. Has n't she talked over that Stuyvesant Square house with you?"

"She has talked over half a dozen. She can't have the Dennings's, because they changed their minds and went back to it."

"Well, this last one is much larger; but she likes

it, and the poor girl ought to have her head — her way, I should say," Mr. Longshore interrupted himself, at a reproachful look from his wife. "People are talking because she defies the proprieties, going about so at once; but I suppose there is nothing to do but to let her go on. Of course she must have some one to live with her."

"That 's another thing that will bother her," Mrs. Longshore said. "I shall see Margaret early tomorrow morning, and talk it over. Here is the carriage, Bert. I wish the Van Ingens did not give such stupid dinners."

The news had preceded them, and, averse as Mrs. Longshore was to any general discussion of Margaret and her affairs, formed the staple of the dinner talk. Mr. Herndon's peculiarities, Mrs. Herndon's inaccessibility; the probability that she had been hard and repellent, and that her husband had ample reason for leaving the world, as he undoubtedly had, by suicide, — was discussed in all its bearings. Mrs. Longshore had been swelling with repressed indignation. These people knew what lifelong friendship existed between them, and were unbearably rude in forgetting or ignoring it; and she turned suddenly upon one of her most persistent questioners, replying in a voice so ringing that every guest paused, and old Mr. Van Ingen laid down his knife and fork and pushed up his spectacles to consider the audacious speaker.

"If Mr. and Mrs. Herndon had been all that you imply," she said slowly, "it is a matter purely their own, of which we can really know nothing at all, and one in which meddling or comment from either you or me is the grossest impertinence."

"Allow me the pleasure of taking wine with you, Mrs. Longshore," Mr. Van Ingen said, after a moment of startled silence; and Mrs. Longshore smiled assent, while Mrs. Van Ingen began a vigorous statement of

the reasons for not allowing dancing at afternoon teas, and her conviction that if young people continued to take the lead, as they were doing, nothing would be left that could be called society. Mr. J. B. P. H. Hurst (for he it was upon whom Mrs. Longshore's indignation had been spent) assented languidly.

"No woman under thirty," he said, with the slightest of glances toward his assailant, "has any real tone or character. By forty she has learned repose, and some ability to present herself as a force; it may be, merely in the sense of an artistic whole, the effect being thus the only voice needed, or she may stand as a subdued yet well-accented individuality, able to expound itself without crudeness or insufficiency."

"What the deuce does the man mean?" growled Stuyvesant Van Ingen, sheltered behind the expansive shoulders of the dowager Van Deventer. "There are moments when it would afford me the purest satisfaction to produce an artistic hole anywhere in his unpleasant little countenance."

Mrs. Van Deventer ignored the remark. She had turned a stony gaze on Mrs. Longshore, and now transferred it with a mingling of approval and toleration to Mr. Hurst, who, if sometimes a trifle insolent in his manner, was known to have come from an unexceptionable family. Young people certainly had much to answer for; and in an animated consideration of their iniquities Mrs. Van Deventer spent the remainder of the evening, with great enjoyment to herself and no more than the usual ratio of boredom for her listeners.

To Margaret, absorbed in her plans and pushing eagerly all preparations in the new home, there was small thought of any wondering or comment in the circle that for eight years had made the only world she had known. To come and go unquestioned, to

arrange as she would for the new life, was so dear a possession that it might even have seemed delight but for the wave of regret and pity that at moments swept over her. All that life might have meant had been lost to them in these years. There were heavy arrears of time to be made up. At last action could be free. Her youth seemed less and less far away. Her old passion of interest in human life revived, and she looked eagerly at the men and women she met. Her heart went out to them all: to the stupid and oblivious, because they were stupid and oblivious; to the faces seamed with evil lines, because they had failed to find their birthright; to the weary worker, man or woman, with a longing to make life easier. She tucked a two-dollar bill into the highly polished fragment of a boot, the advertising-card of a small deformed bootblack at a corner of the Square, and from a safe distance watched the astonishment of the discovery, and laughed to herself with delight. For the next day or two she indulged in experiments of the same nature with small newsboys and forlorn apple-women.

"Very irregular and indiscriminate, and I shall not keep on in this way," she thought; "but how delicious to be for once quite irrational, and play, as I did when a child, that I am a good fairy, and can help everybody!"

"You ought to ride, Margaret. It really is n't decent to march right off under everybody's face and eyes," Mrs. Longshore remonstrated.

"I have ridden all I shall, Sally, till I am an old woman."

"You don't mean to sell those splendid horses!" Mrs. Longshore's voice rose almost to a shriek.

"I have leased them, with all the other things," Margaret answered, with an amused look. "I have lived chiefly to exercise those horses, no matter how

I longed to walk, and I will never be under such bondage again. In the country it is different; but here I can always have a sufficiently handsome carriage from any good stable. I shall do that, and be independent."

"You 're renouncing every privilege," Mrs. Longshore said, with a groan.

"No, I am resuming them," Margaret answered; and Mrs. Longshore looked at her with the puzzled yet always worshipful consideration of her girlhood, and, for the time being, was silenced, to break out anew at some fresh phase of inexplicability.

At last the work was done, and the old house, brightened and rejuvenated, yet so soberly that it seemed only a reproduction of its first estate, stood ready, a few articles that Margaret had chosen to retain being brought down, and placed in a small room opening from hers. Throughout the house there was no other reminder of the past. Simmons wailed as he reflected on the glories of the plate and glass left behind them, and gazed disdainfully at the simple substitutes Mrs. Herndon had chosen; yet even he was forced to admit that the rooms had an expression the other home had never known. Whatever added sense of cheer was needed came to Margaret at last, as she met one afternoon, a day or two before Christmas, in the two old cousins whose faces looked from the car window of a Boston train. Simmons, who had been watching eagerly for their arrival, threw open the door with his grandest air, as the carriage stopped before it, and bowed profoundly. These were real quality, — real as any old Virginia quality, "and a heap like them," he remarked to himself, as Miss Marcia said, "How do you do, Simmons?" and passed on up the stairs. She stopped short on the threshold, as Margaret opened the door, and uttered an exclamation.

"My dear child! Is it possible you remembered so? How could you?"

"I never forget," Margaret said quietly, as Miss Marcia sat down in a straight-backed rocking-chair, the counterpart of her own at home, and looked about. From high-post bed to brass-mounted chest of drawers and dressing-table, and secretary with little fluted pillars at the sides, every article had been duplicated.

"Marley had everything," Margaret explained, "even the Turkey carpet. Don't you see how almost exactly it is like the one in your south parlors? Oh, it has been such a good time!"

Miss Marcia looked up aghast, but Margaret's face was serene and smiling.

"To think that you are actually here!" she said, "and are going down to supper as soon as you are comfortable; not dinner at all, but an old-fashioned supper. Now we shall begin to live."

IX.

THE routine that at once established itself might have been in existence a generation, so natural did it seem. Miss Marcia loved routine, and her days divided themselves as naturally as they had done at Deepmouth into segments, each holding its special occupation. So much sewing and knitting, so much reading, in which Miss Erminia joined at intervals; and a good deal of sight-seeing of a quiet order. She had a passion for lectures, always unsatisfied by what Deepmouth had afforded; and finding that Boston was not alone in its capacities in this direction, subscribed to so many courses that her days were as full as a college student's, and she had barely leisure for the demands made upon her by Mrs. Longshore, who, delighted with her old-fashioned, punctilious courtesy and her unexpected little sarcasms, pronounced her the most promising débutante of the season, and besieged her with invitations. Miss Erminia declined such attentions. She had plunged into a round of delights, all in the line of her rapidly accumulating stock of theories, and alternated between the Swedish Movement Cure, the Pine Needle Oil specialist, and the Metaphysical Metamorphosis, expounded by a serious and snuffy believer in its nature and purpose. There were other mysterious and alluring signs in the same neighborhood as the last, a small side street within sound of the roar of Broadway, and she proposed to investigate them before the winter ended. The car-

riage was at the door daily, punctually at ten. Miss Marcia, as a rule, preferred to walk, and seldom used it; but Miss Erminia enjoyed not only the ease, but a certain sense of distinction in alighting from what was practically her own establishment, and drove from point to point with unflagging ardor.

Margaret smiled as she saw how unnecessary had been her apprehension that they might be homesick and pine for the old house, and went her way more and more absorbed in the work she had chosen. Now and then Miss Marcia went with her, when a morning was not otherwise occupied, but for the most part she preferred to be alone. She had determined to visit every charitable institution of any description whatever, Catholic and Protestant alike, and judge for herself of the character of the work done in each. She had not the help afforded by the present Directory of all such points, but by slow degrees made for herself a list, and from reports and circulars, and her own questions and observations, gathered facts for the little summary of characteristics written below the name of each. What was to come of it she had not yet settled; in fact, hardly knew. The chief point was to decide whether or no her future work should lie with such associations or take more individual form. She distrusted her own ability to judge of persons. An institution was a plain fact, its purpose and its plan not to be mistaken. The man or the woman was a mystery, and the impelling force to action beyond her power to analyze with any sense of security or real knowledge. Yet as she went on, the interminable list still stretching out before her, hospital and reformatory, asylum and refuge, her heart sank. A hundred incomes like hers would vanish and leave no sign, were it a question of impartial distribution; while no one, or even three or four special sources seemed to make

concentration a satisfaction or fulfilment of her real desire.

As the winter went on new complications arose. Mrs. Herndon's movements had been chronicled too long to escape observation now. That she had gone into philanthropy as a distraction was at first whispered, then discussed at length as a singular episode in a career that, after a proper season of suspension, should have belonged once more to society. Professional philanthropists — the class whose motives are so mixed that no man may decide where self-love and self-aggrandizement end and self-renunciation begins — flocked about her. The claims of this and that were urged with a zeal and persistence that at times drove her beside herself. The postman informed Simmons that she ought to have a special carrier, all other mail being pushed out of his bag by hers; and the letters contained every possibility in the way of appeal and demand. Ten women could not have followed up the cases daily presented, and each day could have been entirely spent in the mere answering of letters. How to judge, what to do, became more and more of a problem. Miss Marcia watched her anxiously. In the first days of her coming she had seen that if the serene look of girlhood had gone, Margaret had at least found quiet, and that in time it might mean content and even happiness. At present it was certainly best to leave her quite to herself, ask no questions, make no demands of any sort, but make her feel that if speech were needed, here was freedom to use it. Margaret talked over each day's work, describing the points she had studied, and often reading to Miss Marcia her summary of the impression produced.

"Of course it seems nonsense to you to write it out elaborately," she had said in the beginning, as Miss Marcia took the book in her hand for a moment

one evening. "But I want to know exactly the main points about every one of them, and to be able to turn to them if they are ever needed again. I don't find my way yet, however, in spite of all these guide-posts. Like the man who could n't see the wood for the trees, I can't see my future standpoint because it is all points."

Miss Marcia looked at her doubtfully.

"You are growing thin," she said. "You look anxious and perplexed. Can't you settle down to some one course, Margaret? Subscribe so much a year to so many different things, and not worry as to how the money is administered?"

"It is n't any want of deserving objects," Margaret said, still turning over the leaves. "I believe in dozens of them. It is the sense that there is no end to it; that we may keep on building and endowing, and fresh swarms will pile in and call always for more room. There ought to be a way of lessening numbers instead of making facilities for more and more to be paupers and lunatics and what not."

"But, my dear," Miss Marcia said, "of course you know, 'the poor ye have always with you.' There must be more and more. Think of this great city, growing every day. Of course you must provide for the helpless somehow."

"There must be a way of not having so many helpless,' Margaret said, almost a wail in her voice. "I am lost in this sea of want and imbecility and suffering. There must be some way out, and why has no one found it? The earth is old enough to know better. Why does she keep on perpetuating such conditions?"

"Why don't you talk with the people who have always done this work, my dear?" Miss Marcia said after an anxious pause.

"Because I don't feel about a great many things

as they do, Cousin Marcia. Don't think I am setting myself up as a judge. How could I, when I only seem to myself more and more ignorant every day? There is that beautiful Mrs. Norcross, and a dozen others, — old-time Abolitionists, — hospital nurses in the war, — everything that meant self-sacrifice and good deeds. But they work always for the suffering. It must be, of course; and yet I don't want to bind myself to spend my energies on reforming drunken women or visiting hospitals. I am all in the dark, you see; very blind, very presumptuous, I suppose, but I want somehow to get at a side that nothing seems to touch. I want some happiness brought into hard lives. I want some amusement for the poor, - cheap concerts, perhaps, — decent plays, — good times for the children."

"My dear!" Miss Marcia gasped a little. "Play! We all have to work; and to teach them how to work properly, and get an honest living, seems to me the main thing."

"It is the main thing in one way. That is what they are doing in the asylums and so on. But when I look at the stolid, stupid faces, and even the bright ones, it all looks so bare and hopeless for them. I want them to learn how to enjoy as well as how to work."

"My dear, I am not an Episcopalian; but their notion of duty in the catechism is the most sensible one I know, — 'to learn and labor truly to get mine own living, and to do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me.'"

"They are not called, poor souls! They have no ears to hear, if they were. No, Cousin Marcia, they are thrown in a heap, and crawl out as they can, or are treated as if they were a tremendous game of jackstraws, each one of us who has a fancy for such amusement hooking out a piece, as we may. It is all wrong, and I see no way of making it right."

"I am an old-fashioned person," Miss Marcia said, after another long pause, in which she had patted Margaret's hand and seemed once or twice on the verge of speaking, "but sometimes I think our old ways were best. I like to do as my mother did and as Lucia did. Your cousin Lucia, my dear, had a wonderful mind; and she always held to it that asylums, orphan asylums for instance, — you know there is a little one at Deepmouth, — ought to be abolished. It 's the business of people to take the children into their own homes, she said, and let them have a natural growing up, instead of packing them in together like sardines in a box and letting them grow up in a squad, and an awkward squad at that. Of course that would hardly work now, there are so many orphans; but still she thought we ought to know each person that was helped, and help according to special need. You can do that in a place like Deepmouth, but I suppose it 's impossible here."

"Yes, quite impossible," Mrs. Herndon answered, yet with a certain hesitation in her voice, and then sat looking into the fire till roused by the entrance of Miss Erminia, flushed with excitement, and pushing up her sleeves to show the series of small punctures, the result of a sitting with the Pine Needle Oil specialist.

"It is pure vitality," she said exultingly. "I suppose you are aware, Margaret, that the pine may be said to be the emblem of vitality, and the leaves — the needles, you know — are the expression of its deepest force. The oil from the needles must therefore be the concrete form of its life, a stimulant and a tonic also. All that would be gained, for instance, by a walk under pines can be transferred to your system by this method, in which a series of needles, attached to an instrument which is lightly dipped in the oil, are pressed just far enough into the skin to

reach the circulation. I assure you, I felt the exhilaration on the moment, and barely noticed the prick. You are quite pale, Margaret. You have no idea what new life this would infuse into you. Suppose you go down with me when I go again."

"Heaven forbid!" Miss Marcia said energetically. "Do what you please with your own body and brains, Erminia, but don't expect me not to interfere when it comes to your inoculating anybody else. You've been well enough all your life, as far as I could see; but I suppose you know what you're being treated for."

"Well!" Miss Erminia said tragically. "You mean that I have never gone to bed and given up. You know that I am absolutely undeveloped —"

"I have thought at times that there was something of that nature," Miss Marcia said mildly.

"Absolutely undeveloped," Miss Erminia pursued, with a suspicious glance at Miss Marcia. "There is not a muscle that responds properly, or that does n't ache like the toothache the minute I try to do the simplest things. I just attempted this morning in the ladies' gymnasium to pull myself up and rest my chin on a bar; and if you'll believe it, I not only could n't do it, but got such a cramp I had to be taken down to the Turkish bath and rubbed till the skin came off. It's preposterous not to be able!"

Margaret broke into fits of laughter, — the first time such sound had been heard in months. She had owned always an infectious laugh, rippling and sweet; and as she gave way to the current, Miss Marcia joined her, and even at last the surprised Miss Erminia, who saw nothing to laugh about, and felt that Margaret was certainly hysterical, and needed Pine Needle Oil more even than she had supposed.

But Miss Marcia obstinately turned away from participation from any really advanced lines of action, and left Miss Erminia to more and more enthusiastic devotion to the proceedings which made of this winter the most fascinating one she had ever known. It was passing all too swiftly. February had nearly ended, and still Margaret had come to no absolute decision. She had followed Miss Marcia's suggestion and subscribed to one and another charity, and, as far as possible, she met individual calls upon her. Her instinct was keen. There were times when a look was sufficient, and the man or woman in whose face fraud was plainly stamped found himself quietly dismissed. The proportion of such cases increased. It was more and more certain that the self-respecting poor and those in deepest need were not likely to meet her with glib stories of suffering and demands for help which they claimed as a right. Yet it was to them alone that Margaret yearned; and as her list of institutions lessened, and she found that work would not lie in those channels, she adopted a new course, and now sought out regions the very locations of which she had never dreamed of. Even here it was impossible to know fully the life behind these walls, rising high in narrow streets where snow had not melted, but lay piled on either side, holding in merciful bondage the filth that spring would soon release. She shuddered at the faces she met in street and alley, or peering at her through half-closed blinds, wondering what errand had brought her there. They were young often. Old age has no place in the haunts where youth comes to wear it prematurely, and the woman who has reached forty is counted as almost phenomenal. And for the mass of women, who worked and were respectable, but whose lives went on with no joy in the present, and only unending work in any future, —

whose children were half-fed and half-clothed, and looked with lack-lustre eyes out of pinched and weazened faces, — what help was there? Day after day, Margaret walked through the network of streets on the East Side, buying some trifle at small shops as an excuse for her presence there, questioning where she could, and growing more and more heart-sick as days went on, and her problem was even further from solution than in the beginning.

She had come to know one or two of the city missionaries, but thus far their work had seemed to her rather that of proselyting than of pointing the way of escape from the foulness to which they seemed condemned. She went with them from home to home, at times sick with the suffering she encountered, at times as certain that fraud ruled, and that help was impossible and undesired. There were moments, even, when she wished herself a Roman Catholic, with free will eliminated once for all, and herself and this burden of an income handed over to the direction of the Church. Her own, if it could be called such, answered none of her questions. The congregation of which she considered herself a member had its Ladies' Relief Committee, and did more or less work among the up-town poor. They had appealed to Mrs. Herndon to take active part in their meetings; but she shrunk at present from intercourse with any who looked at her curiously, and to whom it was impossible to speak her real thought. The Featherstones had a theoretical interest in the poor, and had even discussed the advisability of establishing a church kindergarten; but the project still languished. The congregation was, in some senses, a floating one. There were substantial members, — a few pew-holders, who carried the chief burden of expenses, — but the seats were filled, Sunday after Sunday, in part by strangers who came to judge

if the preacher were as eloquent as he had been reported to be, in part by people literary or artistic as the case might be, and with general sympathies quite lost in their own particular cult. For the most of them the cynical element predominated. Moved at moments by the power of the preacher before them, whose voice, with its melancholy undertone, rang out in vehement denunciation of old systems, or in appeal for that new faith which should recognize the world, methods remained as misty and uncertain as the real beliefs of those who listened and of him who spoke.

It was certain that the purest of lives, the deepest religious spirit, were the portion of the man who, in his opening prayer, touched heights so above all petty issues or ignoble aims, so alive with a light from deeper sources of light beyond, that the afterglow lingered, and even vivified, the colder words of sermon. But off the platform the speaker froze once more. The friend who came close enough had glimpses of the heart that could glow, and that did keep the altar-fire alive before a great issue. But perpetual question ended all possibility of decisive action. The preacher dreamed of the temple of the future, wherein all men should meet as friends, and worship of the great Soul of life be stately and noble beyond all vision of the present. His pale face lighted, and his wonderful words took captive imagination, and made his dream the dream of all. But when the spell had passed, his doubt returned; and because doubt had been the foundation, real union, a common aim, a common striving, and accomplishment failed them all.

In spite of his best endeavor, his most earnest purpose, with each year of a vain effort a wall of ice thickened about the man, whose sad, inscrutable eyes gazed through it, and whose hands sought in

vain to break a way and clasp other hands stretched toward him. Scholarly, exquisitely refined, wise in the wisdom of the past, and keeping pace with all progress in the present, how could it be that his work meant only intellectual delight, so keen, so etherealized, that it might well count itself as spiritual? Sunday after Sunday Margaret had thrilled under the spell that held only a deeper charm as time went on, yet found that, when the fervor passed, nothing tangible remained. Little by little she had ceased to question; and the soul so ardent, so full of hope, found itself drifting on an unknown sea.

At times she had talked with Mr. Featherstone, who long ago had become one of her firmest friends, and whose house was one of the few in which she found unfailing enjoyment. He had recommended Comte at last, his own occasional assertion of strong faith having failed to convince either his listener or himself that it had any firm hold; and in reading Comte, Margaret found a vague satisfaction, ending at last in the dreary sense that she only was to blame, and that the Gospel of Humanity ought to fill and satisfy her far more really than it did. She believed it. Man's mission was to man. It was because she believed it that she had longed all her life to help. It was because she believed it that these years in which she had been forbidden any chance to help had so eaten into her soul that often she felt old and worn. And now, when freedom had come, when life lay before her once more her own, how was it that doubt still remained stronger than hope, and that no way out presented itself? Pretty Mrs. Featherstone, with her delicate, high-bred face, and a look which involuntarily seemed to demand of all strangers, "Had you a grandfather, and if so, who?" shook her head in perplexed consideration; and her husband, who had smiled a little and then sighed, as

Margaret told them some of her experiences, spoke decisively at last.

"You are morbid, dear Mrs. Herndon, and we cannot wonder. You are over-conscientious, the result of your New England background. A Puritan ancestry is responsible for the largest portion of your discomfort. Look at it largely. It is certain that progress is inevitable. The simple fact of existence in this nineteenth century is a partial education to these people, who serve the time and the ends of their being better than you know. I do not say that they need no personal effort, and I have the highest value for philanthropic workers. But you must see, in spite of sympathy and natural bias, that you are not made for personal effort among them. Give freely as you will, but reserve your force for other ends. Self-development, if perfectly accomplished by each, would practically bring about the general elevation you desire. Give your tastes and talents full opportunity. Let culture do its utmost, and you will find satisfaction and happiness in as large measure as the limitations of life allow."

Mr. Featherstone leaned forward, and for a moment took her hand, — a demonstration of interest and affection that moved Margaret more deeply than his words. Mrs. Featherstone glowed with interest and pride.

"Cyrenius is so right!" she said. "He always is right, dear Mrs. Herndon. You will come out of this morbid state, and find that there is so much to live for still!"

They were in the study, — a room filled with suggestions of noble work; one side lined with books, and everywhere, in bronze and picture and hangings, the evidence of severe and delicate perception of the highest art.

"If I were a book-maker like yourself," Margaret

said, after a pause, in which she had taken in again every detail of the perfect surroundings, "my way, I suppose, would be clearer. You know exactly what each day can hold, and are conscious that thousands will be moved by your thought. That is your work for humanity. But I, you see, have no distinct vocation, unless this one powerful drawing indicates what it may be. We will wait a little longer, and perhaps I shall see more clearly whether it is a true light or only a will-o'-the-wisp that I am following."

She rose as she spoke, and crossed the room to look at a carved screen which stood near the door,— a piece of work well-nigh as delicate and intricate as a Chinese carving.

"Some new spoil from Italy?" she said, bending to look at it more closely.

"Not at all. You would say so, naturally; but it comes from no more foreign a country than Ninth Avenue, somewhere between Tenth and Twentieth Streets. I can get you the number. It is a German whom Reichart employs at times, and whom I have not seen. Lessing is his name; Berthold Lessing. Reichart showed me a screen like this somewhat, though less elaborate, and I gave an order at once. I was half inclined to go to the man himself. There is almost genius in some bits of the thing."

"Quite, I think," Margaret answered. "Let me have the number some day — or, stay, I need not trouble you; I can get it easily from Reichart himself."

"Mr. Featherstone will like to get it for you himself, my dear," Mrs. Featherstone said. "And perhaps, some day when you have leisure, we might go to the shop and see what he has; though, after all, he probably takes orders merely, and lives in some dreadful little hole smelling of onions and sour-krout, and swarming with dirty children."

Mr. Featherstone shuddered slightly, and smiled as he did so.

"An involuntary tribute to the truth of your description," he said. "I confess to an unconquerable dislike to evil odors, and prefer to deal through middlemen, who have come up from the same thing, most probably, and so are not as susceptible."

"You are quite right, my love," Mrs. Featherstone said seriously. "And I hope Margaret will feel the same."

Mrs. Herndon's eyes had rested on the clergyman's face with that inscrutable look they sometimes wore, yet with a question in their clear depths. She gave it no form, however, but it repeated itself as she went toward home. Was it certain that middlemen were an essential of civilization? Must there be always interpreters, and never speech that could be comprehended without them? If the nations of the earth were of one blood, — if the same spirit moved in all, with clear or with shadowed light as the development of each allowed, — must there not be a common ground of meeting as well, some method by which understanding was to be had? Or was it all an insoluble problem, and the "everlasting No" infinitely more certain than the "everlasting Yea"? Margaret shook her head with the same sense of something overwhelming stealing upon her threateningly, that had risen in her childhood, and then smiled as she recalled her own deliberate encountering of terror at the old tomb.

"They have all found their answer," she said, half aloud; "and mine must come in the same way, it may be."

. . . . . .

"There 's a woman that would n't take no, an' that 's been a-settin' in the reception-room like she was glued there," Simmons said, as he opened the

door. "I done told her 't wa'n't your hours, an' you would n't see nobody till to-morrow; but she said, mighty sure like, 'She 'll see me,' an' just walked in, an' I thought maybe she 'd got an appointment."

Mrs. Herndon had frowned slightly. This was one of the importunate people who had no sense of fitness, and who would force her to dismiss them in the way that always reacted upon herself and gave her a sense of hard-heartedness that often followed her for days. She would send her away at once; and she entered the room, wearing her coldest expression.

The woman who rose to meet her was gaunt and gray and skinny, but it was not the gauntness of poverty. Nor was it the gray of old age that had given an even tint to eyes and hair and skin, a tint accented by the darker gray of the dress she wore. Margaret had seen the same type among the Florida "crackers" a winter or two before, and for a moment thought that some one with whom she had perhaps talked then had escaped from the starved, forlorn life, as neutral and joyless as themselves, and sought her out as deliverer. The voice was unmistakably Northern, however, and the face expressed entire disapproval. "Good gracious me! Then you 're a young thing, after all!" she said querulously. "You ain't what I expected to find, or what I was lookin' for."

"In that case there is no necessity for an interview," Mrs. Herndon said, with a half-smile at the scrutiny bestowed upon her, — a smile that deepened as she saw the calm consideration with which she was viewed.

"I ain't a beggar, nor ever was," the woman said, "an' there 's money enough in my purse to keep me goin' a week, easy, and take me back where I come from. But Mrs. Dexter, up the avenue a bit, said you was lookin' round for folks to help, an' she thought

maybe you 'd like to talk with me. That 's a thing I study over consid'able, an' she did n't seem to take much interest. Said maybe you would, though; an' I reckoned you was some middle-aged party that did n't just see what to do with their money, an' that maybe we might talk it over a bit. An' I was inquirin' round, too, for some kind woman that would act like a mother to a human bein'. You don't know of none such?"

The woman had seated herself, and looked inquiringly at Mrs. Herndon, who also sat down, too amazed to realize that she had intended to dismiss her at once. A sense of absolute equality and independence emanated from the whole gaunt person, and looked out from the small gray eyes that rested on her unwinkingly, while a demand was there also, as little to be resisted as the spell of the Ancient Mariner.

"I can listen to you for a few minutes," Mrs. Herndon said, after a moment's hesitation.

"I ain't partic'ler about it 's bein' to-night," the woman said; "but as long 's you say so, 't won't do any harm to open up a little. What I 've got to find fault with first is, there ain't a place where a respectable woman can get a night's lodging. I declare for 't I was tuckered out enough, goin' from pillar to post last night; an' if I had n't met a Quaker woman, like 's not I should have been out all night. I says to her, 'I 'm a stranger, an' just as respectable as you be, an' I 've gone hither an' yon, and can't be taken in anywheres, because they 're full or because I hain't a recommendation, or because I ain't a man. I don't want to be, neither; but if you 'll just tell me where I 'd better go, I 'll go to onct.' She looked at me a minute, powerful s'archin', — maybe you know her, big black eyes as ever you see, — an' then she says, 'Go to such an' such a place on Ninth Avenue, an' say I sent you, — Friend Norcross.' So I went, with-

out more words, an' found it was a kind of a carpenter's shop, an' a little room over it just big enough to turn in, an' me glad enough to get into it. I had a letter from the Philadelphia folks to Mrs. Dexter, — I lived in Camden awhile, — an' when I begun s'archin' round, went over to a place in the city where they look out for women. But the lady there, she did n't seem to feel certain what to say. I told her I was alone in the world, an' ready for most any kind o' work that would leave me some spare time; an' she said why did n't I open a room out near the University, and have a little circular, an' offer to do mending for the students? I thought it over, an' then I says, I can't see as it 's just the thing. I could n't feel to go against my gifts that way, for it will take the whole time. You see, I 'd about made up my mind to be an electric doctor. I 'm packed so full of electricity that I go off in sparks whenever I 'm touched an' 't ain't too damp. I healed a great many cases of incurable disease in New Jersey, but you see New Jersey is too healthy. Then I went over to Philadelphia, an' a doctor there made me a splendid offer. I was to get so much a week, an' be at his call all hours of day an' night. But I said, 'Can I have no time for exercising the kindness of my heart? Can I never have a day off for my social nature? Then never will I so bind myself.' An' I did n't."

"I am afraid you lost a good opportunity," Mrs. Herndon said, as another of the long looks showed that some response was expected.

"Maybe, but there 's others, an' you see I have so many gifts. Take my zephyr worsted flowers, now; they have the very look of nature, an' then they 're so much more durable. Nature ain't durable in no way, unless it is rocks and trees and such. I 've been an orfant since I was twelve, an' I feel for all orfants. I was Amanda Biggs then, an' Amanda

Biggs you see me now. There was a chance. I might 'a' had a man named Briggs, but 't wa'n't difference enough in names to satisfy me, an' I did n't take no notice of it whatever. I was sort of drawn to New York, an' here I be; but I call it a place that don't take no int'rest. I want folks that take an int'rest. I do myself."

Once more Miss Biggs paused, and looked reflectively at Mrs. Herndon.

"You 're young to look at," she said presently, "but you 're older 'n I be inside. I ain't a-goin' to say nothin' about what I reckon 's made you so. I know, many a time, an' don't tell. You can't hide the life-lines from Amanda. You look as if you 'd take an int'rest, too, even if you be younger 'n I expected. Now, I make up my mind sudden in general, an' I made it up that way this morning. I like the folks I 'm with, an' I 'm goin' to stay awhile, next door to 'em; for this room I had last night is the 'stranger's room,' an' has to be left free for them that need it. 'T ain't been open long."

"I should like to know about it," said Mrs. Herndon, who was fast acquiring a liking for this very distinct individual.

"It 's over a carpenter's — no, not exactly a carpenter's shop, but a shop where the man carves; carves handsome, too. His name 's Lessing."

"Ah!" Margaret said, surprised.

"Yes. You don't know him, do you? I got a glimpse of a boy, — his'n, I reckon, — an' there was a woman, han'som' as a pictur', that brought me some hot coffee after they 'd made me come down an' git warm. They said I could stay there a day or two, but there was a real respectable woman next door had a room to rent, an' I went in an' took it for a week. Then I thought I 'd see what this Mrs. Dexter was like, an' she got oneasy, and said

maybe you 'd attend to what I 'd got to say. I suppose you think I ain't comin' to the point. What I want of you ain't money, — it 's int'rest. To feel that there 's a fellow-bein' that 'll help me to carry out the natural kindness of my heart. I 've come to stay, if I find I can help folks; an' I should n't wonder if it might turn out that I 've fallen in with the right kind. If you ain't no objections, I 'll call again some day an' tell you how it turns out."

There was a simple good faith about the undaunted Miss Biggs that was its own passport; and Mrs. Herndon, to her own surprise, found herself shaking hands with her grotesque visitor, and telling her at what hours she could find her. Miss Marcia laughed, but shook her head, over the report of the interview, to which Miss Erminia listened with delighted interest.

"I must see her, Margaret," she said. "An electric doctor! She must be a most valuable person to know. Can't I go to her place? Suppose we all go!"

"For Heaven's sake, Erminia!" Miss Marcia began; but the summons to dinner checked further protest, and the matter apparently passed from Miss Erminia's mind.

With Margaret the recurrence of Lessing's name fixed the impression of the morning. He was a lover of his kind, then, as well as a skilful carver; and she must see for herself what manner of man he was. Mr. Featherstone brought her the number within a day or two; and one afternoon in the latter days of April she took a cross-town car, and, after a little search, found the place. There seemed to be no one within as she entered the shop; and after a moment's hesitation, she went on to the inner room, and knocked on the partition. Some one moved. The door into the back room opened slowly, and a woman looked out timidly, as if half afraid.

"Mr. Lessing is not here," she said. "He will not be back until six. Can I do anything for you?"

Mrs. Herndon stood silent, her eyes fixed on the speaker. This was a woman, pale, worn, with dark shadows under the great, sad eyes, yet with a reminder of the girl whose face, as it turned to her from the spring at the roadside, she had never forgotten. Of course it was but a chance resemblance, yet something in the woman's eyes confirmed the sudden impression.

"Can it be?" she cried. "Is it possible that you are Meg? You must be. Meg, do you know me?"

Intense surprise was on the pale face. Then, as the woman bent forward and studied Margaret's eagerly, it suddenly glowed with wondering delight. Her eyes shone, and she made a motion toward her.

"Yes, I am Meg," she said; "and I know you."

X.

MARGARET had stretched out both hands as the moment of recognition came. This pale woman, whose face bore ineffaceable traces of care and pain, and something deeper than either, was not the Meg whose brilliant beauty had photographed itself on her mind and made of that moment at the spring a picture fresh to-day as then. Never since that day when she had turned back on the hillside under the pines, longing to comfort the child who looked after her through streaming tears, had stronger yearning filled her to help and understand. Dividing lines had no more power now than then. Her hands were still stretched out; but Meg, who had thrown open the door and moved forward impulsively, put her own behind her with a sudden decision Margaret could not understand.

"You turned from me once before, Meg," she said, "and then I lost you for years. I never intend to lose you again."

Meg's eyes rested on her with sad earnestness. The glow had faded.

"A month ago I should have thought you need not," she said. "Now it is better for you to have nothing to do with me."

"Why, Meg?"

"Because you are clean and I am foul. Don't I know the look that I've remembered through everything,—through things I could n't tell, and you could n't understand if I did tell. I knew I should

see you some time, but I thought it would be far off, where I could look at you and you not know. I never thought it would be close to me, where I could touch you if I did not hold back. And I will hold back. You must not come any nearer."

"I don't know what you have done or been, Meg," Margaret said. "It is nothing, I know, that need count now, else you could not have that face. I do not know myself why I have wanted always to find you, and felt that I must; but so it has been. Do you think I should let you slip away from me now? You are in trouble, — you look very ill. Tell me about it."

Meg had retreated into the little inner room, and sank down now in a chair.

"I had a — an accident a little while ago," she said, "and it broke a rib. We did not know it till the next evening. So I am not well, and I have had a little trouble, too."

"But you ought to be in bed," Mrs. Herndon said. "A broken rib is terrible. Is n't there any one to make you take care of yourself?"

"I have been on the bed all day. It is nothing that keeps anybody still, as if they had broken something they had to use. I must be careful; that is all."

"How did it happen? Was it a fall?"

"Yes, — it was a sort of fall," Meg said confusedly. "I was a little faint, and people do fall then, you know."

"She must have a drunken husband," Margaret thought. "He has beaten her, and she is trying to shield him. Can it be this carver?"

The door opened at this moment, and Felix rushed through the shop and to his mother, laying his cheek against hers for a moment, and then using his hands with wonderful effect, as he told her some bit of school experience. He turned now, surprised at

seeing a stranger, and looked at her intently, his brilliant eyes showing instant approval.

"Is he yours?" Mrs. Herndon asked.

"He is mine," Meg said, almost defiantly. "He is deaf and dumb, and so nobody need want him but me."

"He is beautiful," Margaret said, still studying Meg's face. "He is a comfort, I see, even if he cannot speak. I think if you knew how much I want to know it all, Meg, you would tell me. Don't let me seem strange to you. Can't you think of the time when I ran away to the swamp because I wanted to see you so, and don't you remember the little ring?"

"I remember everything!" Meg cried passionately. "It is because I remember everything — things that I thought were all dead and gone — that I want you to go away and never find me again. When I saw you first, I forgot. It was so good, I could n't help but forget; but you must not come near me. You must go away."

Felix had turned threateningly as he saw his mother's agitated face. Something was wrong again; and though the beautiful lady was not like the dreadful man who had made such trouble, she was a stranger, and perhaps from him. He placed himself between the two, and eyed Margaret with a puzzled frown.

"See, Meg, you are making the child think me your enemy," Margaret said, almost with a sob. "How can you do so, when you know how long I have wanted to find you?"

"He shall not; he shall know you are the best and the most wonderful and beautiful there is anywhere," Meg said eagerly. "I shall tell him all I can. But everybody you know would be angry if they knew I let you talk to me."

"I am all alone, Meg. There is no one who will be angry, or even know anything about it unless I choose to tell. I am more alone than you, for I have no child. I will go away now, if you want me to; but I shall come again, till you get to know that I am really your friend."

There were tears in Margaret's eyes as she rose. It was true. Even here, where she most longed to help, she was useless. Something in her barred the way to understanding, and she had not learned how to set it aside. She looked wistfully at Meg, whose eyes were fixed on her, and who put out her hand toward her with a sudden change of expression.

"Don't go," she said. "I am going to tell you the whole. I thought I would not, but how can I let you go away from me!"

"Lie down then," Margaret said. "Perhaps it is best that you should not talk. If it is, I will come again to-morrow."

"No; who knows what may happen by to-morrow? I want to tell it now, and then you will not want to come again."

Meg had lain down, slowly, and with difficulty. Her sleeve had slipped up; and as Margaret saw a dark bruise across her arm a thrill of indignation went through her at the cruelty that had left such marks. She looked at Meg in wonder. Her voice was full, yet soft; her face refined, and with a pathos in it now that brought tears as she looked. How had it all come, — this strange growth from the wild child in the swamp, and the barefoot, defiant girl at the spring? Sorrow had done it, she knew, — the brooding spirit that steals light from the eyes and color from the cheek, and graves lines that may be hard or tender, as its mission is accepted or rejected. For Meg there was still only wonder and sad acceptance, and faithlessness in any future that could bring

the old security and peace. Here was her stronghold, yet out of it she had been wrenched, and who should say how long safety would endure? She would tell it all. It might be that it would help, and, whether it helped or not, Margaret must know.

"Tell me your name," she said. "It is different, now, is n't it? and then I will tell it all."

"I was little Margaret Wentworth when you saw me first; I am Margaret Herndon now."

Meg's eyes dwelt on her face as if she would learn every line by heart. In spite of herself, comfort was stealing in, — such comfort as she had not felt since that first moment when the door opened to her and she clasped the child again. Terror had settled upon her even then; an unreasoning terror, she knew, but holding its place in spite of all assurance. The shock had been too great, and only time and quiet days could bring back hope or confidence. Margaret's clear eyes seemed a promise of both, yet how would they look at her when once all was known?

"I must tell it from the very beginning," she said; "all that happened when I went away from you, and all." And as if another moment's delay would seal her lips and make truth impossible, she hurried on. She had told Jerry only what must be known before he could help her, but this was different. Clearly as she had seen it all in those terrible days when she waited at the mercy of the man who had again deceived her, she poured it out: the careless days in which she knew nothing better, and did only what she saw the others doing daily; the small hopes and ambitions that grew slowly, and had made her bent upon something different; the marriage that was no marriage, and its ending. The revelation was as absolute as if she knelt a penitent in the confessional. She had closed her eyes, for she would not see the look of loathing that must be by this time on

Margaret's face; but she opened them now, struck dumb with surprise. Margaret was bending over her, and tears streamed down her face.

"Poor Meg! poor Meg!" she said. "How I pity you!"

Meg did not speak for a moment. Then she caught Margaret's hand and kissed it passionately.

"You have come through fire, and you are purified," Margaret said, holding her hand and looking at her in wonder. "Meg, I think it is a miracle. You, what you are, out of all that dreadfulness!"

"But it was n't me. I did n't do anything. It was Berthold, the man that saved me. He has done everything. Now I will tell you that, and then the other, — if I can."

Felix, who had curled up on the bed at her feet, watching her face, had fallen asleep; and Margaret took a shawl from a chair and spread over him, then sat down again and took the hand that Meg still tried to withdraw.

"Not yet, not yet!" she said. "Let me tell it all."

Once more she went on, the quiet life with Lessing and for Felix making itself plain; and as she told it, bit by bit, something of her own feeling for this redeemer from ignorance and sin and sad fortune was born in Margaret's mind as she listened, and with it the vague sense that at last, through the same means, her own way might be made clearer. She must not think of this now; for Meg was telling her of the cruel days that ended peace, and turned away her face as she spoke.

"I did n't know any other way," she said brokenly. "I had to go with him. I thought that this time he was telling the truth, and that he had a right. And so — and so — "

She broke into sobs. "Oh, don't you see what it

has done? I thought I was all through with shamefulness, and now it was all a lie; and even if I am back here, I know it, and I can see his face all the time. I don't even want to touch Felix, sometimes. Everything is spoiled, even if he never finds me again."

"Meg, listen to me," Margaret said imperatively. "It makes no difference, — not one particle. Do you suppose there is anybody wicked enough to think you were anything but a woman trying to save her child? You are sick and half distracted, but you shall not call yourself anything but good. I honor you with all my heart and soul, and I shall honor you to the day of my death. You are a brave, good, beautiful soul, and I love you for telling me the whole. Now let us put it all away. Talk to me about it, if it will be any comfort; but I want you to forget again. You are not the old Meg; Lessing was right. He saw your soul, and it is noble as his own."

Margaret had risen; and as she ended she bent over Meg and kissed her solemnly, tenderly.

"You must be quiet now, and get well," she said. "I shall send you a doctor, — one I know, — and he will cure you quickly. You must be taken care of, for I need you very much as soon as you are well. I wish I could take you home."

"But, nein," a voice said behind her; and she started violently as she saw a tall man in the doorway, looking at her with kind eyes. "I know you not," he said, "but you must be friend."

"Yes, I am friend indeed," Margaret answered. She knew instinctively that it was Lessing. "Meg will tell you about me. I came to give an order, but I shall do that to-morrow. I shall come in the morning. She needs care. Is there any one to help?"

"I help, myself," Lessing answered, looking with pleased interest at Margaret's face. "But fear not. There is woman-help, too, and it is kind. To you who have much, I can see it is all small, and you breathe not well in such space; but we know it. She shall have all care."

"That 's easy to say," remarked the high voice of Miss Biggs, who had suddenly appeared in the shop, and who smiled affably as her eyes rested on Mrs. Herndon. "Did n't I say there 'd be a chance for my gifts to show 'emselves sooner 'n anybody 'd think? An' here I be, with 'lectricity enough to set all the broken bones in New York with a snap. Not that this needs settin'; for I ain't such a fool but what I know it does n't. What I 'm good for now is to see that she ain't liftin' things an' goin' off in tantrums if the door opens sudden-like; an' here I stay till she 's out of 'em."

"It is a good soul, and of a kind I know not well," Lessing said, considering Miss Biggs attentively. "It is much to be sure always. I could wish surety more mine also; but I study it now, and soon I shall see."

There was no sarcasm in the words. Miss Biggs's personality had evidently impressed itself upon him as strongly as it had upon Margaret.

"You know her, then?" she said with a smile, and meeting Lessing's pleased and quiet examination of her face as simply as it was made.

"Ach, Gott!" he said; "why can there not be more of the same? No, I know her not till she comes for help, I have thought. But it is to help, it seems; and she will order us all, but always for good. For myself, one gift is not so sure; but if she say it is hers, why shall I doubt? At least she has been a conductor for force, if not the force itself."

He had followed Mrs. Herndon into the shop, and

she stood there, hesitating. In spite of his poor dress, it was plain that this was no common workman, yet everything seemed of the humblest order. She colored as she took out her purse.

"I am an old friend of Meg's," she said, "and you will let me leave a little money with you for what she may need?"

"There is enough," he said, with a slight gesture that made Margaret instantly slip the purse out of sight. "You shall help if need be," he added; "that is our right forever with all men, if need come. But now, all is well if Meg can but be herself again. I would grind that evil one to powder if it could help her. She has told you — is it not so? How can we make her mind all quiet once more?"

"I shall know better when I have seen her more," Mrs. Herndon said. "Change may be what she must have. We will see. I shall come in the morning."

Lessing's eyes followed her as she left the shop and hurried toward the car. It was late, almost the dinner hour, and Miss Marcia would be anxious. She walked on, with the curious sense that the afternoon had brought a change, even a crisis, in her own life, — inward, if not outward. At least here was something very tangible to be done. This man, living among the poor, knowing their real thought and need as only one could who lived their life, must know better than any Board, better than any mere student from the outside, what should be done. Something benignant and wise looked from his eyes and spoke in his quiet voice. Were there others like him, buried in the little shops she passed, and doing their work as unobtrusively as he? Hardly, for this was a face unlike any she had ever seen; unworldly, simple, direct, yet with a sense of strength. There was humor, too, for the glint in his eyes as they rested on Miss Biggs showed that her personality was to be

smiled at as well as studied. There was a curious reminder also of Dr. Strothers, and Margaret wondered why it suggested itself.

"It must be that simple directness," she thought. "No beating about the bush, but coming instantly to the point, with a speed that takes away the breath of common people."

She had entered the car, and shrunk a little as she took her place among the crowd of girls just out from some factory, and bearing with them the close smell of lint and oil and unaired clothing. She reproached herself in a moment. They were loud-voiced and unpleasant, chaffing one another with many friendly pokes and sudden pulls, and all with an eye to one or two flashily dressed young men, who stood among them, and at intervals made some lofty response to the implied homage.

"I suppose this represents society to them," Margaret thought, as she watched them; "and really it seems very much of the same order as a good deal I have known under that name. Give that loudest girl some education and better clothes, and she might even be a social leader."

Some one jumped on at the crossing of Seventh Avenue, and made his way to the front. Margaret did not look up, having fallen into a meditation over this and other puzzles; and she started as a voice said, —

"I could not believe it at first. It really is Mrs. Herndon."

Margaret colored with pleasure as, looking up, she saw Dr. Strothers. "I had been thinking of you," she said, giving him her hand. "How strange that you should suddenly be here! I have been meaning to send for you to talk over several things, and I wanted, also, that you should see my two old cousins, Miss Marcia Wentworth and her sister. You were

there once or twice with your uncle, they told me. It is all wrong that the winter should have gone without my doing this. I don't know how it has happened."

"As everything in New York happens," he said with a smile. "'Out of sight, out of mind,' though that has not been the case with me. Mr. Longshore has told me a little of your life, and I knew I should hear it from you when the right time came."

"I wonder if it is the right time now," Mrs. Herndon said. "Can you go home with me, and dine, or are you too busy?"

"There is a patient at half-past eight, and nothing else in the way," Dr. Strothers said, with frank pleasure. "And as we can hardly discuss matters in full, and do justice to Deepmouth also, I will make an appointment with you as nearly in deference to your hours as my hours will allow. I am in my office till eleven, and in the hospital till half-past one — sometimes later — and the outside patients are sandwiched in between three and six. I will keep evenings for myself when I can."

"Then it must be evening, for evidently you have nothing else that is yours. Let me use the minute that is mine now, and tell you what I wanted." And Mrs. Herndon told hastily the state in which she had found Meg.

"I want her case attended to immediately," she said, "and you understand that it is quite my own affair."

"Where is she?" Dr. Strothers said, nodding approval. "How very singular!" he added in a moment, as Mrs. Herndon repeated the number. "So you are suddenly one of that nest of mysteries."

"Then you know it?"

"Yes, I know it, but not her. I have caught glimpses of her, — a wonderful face, always retreating

when one most wanted to watch it. I want to know all that I may."

"It seems half profanation to repeat her story at all," said Margaret, "and I do not feel sure that I shall tell even my dear old cousin Marcia the whole, though I cannot tell yet. But I want you to understand her, for I think you can help. I will tell you after you have seen her."

"I should do it for Lessing's sake, even if you had no wish," he said. "He is a wonderful soul. I am always meaning to know more of him, but each day seems to hold all it can at present. I go there every now and then, however, to hear them all wrangle and theorize and sometimes amaze you suddenly with a truth or a thought tossed about among them like a shuttlecock. I must tell you about them. They have given me some invaluable hints — more than hints — lessons; but they are a wild set."

They came, almost as he ended speaking, to Second Avenue, and walked down the block or two between them and the Square.

"I am not in dinner dress," Dr. Strothers said suddenly, "and shall outrage Miss Marcia's sensibilities, and very likely yours also. And there is n't time to go home."

He had been looking down at Mrs. Herndon's face as they walked, noting the change in expression, and nodding approvingly to himself as he did so. The six months had made a strange difference. This was hardly the same woman whose cold hand he had taken on that November evening as she went up the steps of the great house he had not seen again. He had meant to call, if for nothing more than to show that he did not forget; but the change of location came suddenly, and she had made no sign. It was just as well; but now no such accident must intervene again, and he should see that it did

not. He must know, if it were only as a bit of study, what the mental processes had been that had brought about such upheaval of habit and disregard of established methods. He had thought all this as he stood gravely considering his most informal sack-coat, and looking from it to Mrs. Herndon's serious face, which suddenly smiled again.

"It is an important question," she said, as Simmons threw open the door and looked with interest at the unusual apparition. "I can answer for Miss Marcia; and for the rest, you may judge for yourself."

Miss Erminia flew down the hall with a little shriek.

"Margaret, how could you! We never mean to be anxious generally, but it is half an hour past dinner-time, and Marcia is nervous as a witch. Goodness! I thought it was Mr. Featherstone. It can't be — why, yes, it certainly is young Paul Strothers!"

"Young Paul no longer — though I have changed much more than you have," Dr. Strothers hastened to add, as Miss Erminia's countenance fell slightly, to rise again as he shook hands warmly.

"Marcia is in there," she said, leading the way, with an instant sense of proprietorship, as Mrs. Herndon ran lightly up the stairs. "She will feel like old times when she sees you; only why have n't you come before? Margaret's mourning, I suppose, — though nobody would know she was in mourning, for she never puts it on: the Coolidge of her, I suppose. But really, where it is such old friends, knowing your uncle before you were born and all, there is n't any sense at all in forms. You ought to have come. Marcia, it is Hartley's nephew, Paul, you know."

Miss Marcia rose with more than usual cordiality

Hartley Southernwood had been one of the lovers who had wasted much time in persuading Miss Lucia to forget her resolution against marriage; and this boy, the son of his youngest sister, would always have an interest for her on that account, if no other.

"From twenty-five to thirty-four is a jump," he said, with a boyish laugh at Miss Marcia's astonished face, as she looked him over with a wondering —

"Why, Paul, how you have grown! And how much you look like your mother!"

"That is delightful," Dr. Strothers said, "though I am not sure but that she would resent the charge. She is as little, you know, as I am big."

"She never seemed small to me when she was a girl," Miss Marcia said reflectively. "We were just of a height. It is most singular," she went on with a little laugh, "I have always felt tall, and have to stop and think that I am only a little old lady. I wish you had come before. We are going very soon now."

"Not if I can help it," said Miss Erminia, decisively. "I had quite forgotten that you were a doctor, Paul, and I suppose you won't like it at all when I tell you that I don't believe in doctors in the least — your kind, I mean — and wish you was n't one. Because there is no doubt that you belong to one of the most prejudiced classes in the community, and stand in the way of progress terribly."

"I should, I don't doubt, if I believed in them myself," Dr. Strothers returned calmly, as Mrs. Herndon entered, and Simmons, just behind, announced, with a flourish, —

"Dinner is served, madam."

Miss Marcia took his arm with a sense of something strong and comfortable in the face that, after

all, was not so much the mother as the father. The Southernwood look was there; but it came and went, with the elusive quality of many family resemblances, defying definition save in chance gleams of expression. She wondered for a moment why Margaret had not spoken of him, and why he should suddenly appear in this informal way as if he were an old and privileged friend. Perhaps he had been, and Mr. Herndon's death had shut him out, though under the circumstances Margaret should have let him know they were there. Nobody could count it an impropriety if he came to see his mother's and his uncle's oldest friend. Margaret had been absorbed, and perhaps it was just as well; but Miss Marcia's heart had warmed to him at once, and it seemed a loss not to be made up that they had had nothing of him all winter.

Miss Erminia in the mean time had been silent in amazement, but found voice as she seated herself opposite him, and surveyed his dancing eyes. Could it be that he was "hygienic," and that for consistency's sake she must suddenly decline dessert and ignore sweet pickles? The Pine Needle Oil man advocated a generous diet.

"With a generous diet *and* Pine Needle Oil, ma'am, you'll bound through the air, as it were, before the winter's over," he had said; and Miss Erminia had acted upon this principle. It was Mulligatawney soup, and Dr. Strothers was eating it calmly. Clearly he was not what she had feared; but she avoided tasting her own till she had said, —

"You don't mean that you're an eclectic? I thought you studied at a regular college."

"What is eclectic?" Dr. Strothers asked gravely.

"Oh, that shows you are not," Miss Erminia said, relieved, and at once attacking her soup. "But if you have n't any faith in doctors, you must find it very

difficult to get along. Dr. Jackman said that all regular physicians at forty were necessarily frauds, because they had to pretend they knew, when really they did n't know anything."

"He is a man of discernment," Dr. Strothers said. "I am not forty, but I feel that I am approaching his views more and more nearly. Are you one of his disciples?"

Miss Erminia blushed, and Miss Marcia smiled covertly as she waited her answer.

"Why, in a way — I mean, I know a good deal about him. But if you agree with him, why don't you say so openly, and stop calling yourself regular?"

Miss Erminia ended triumphantly, feeling that she had diverted attention from herself most successfully.

"I am a surgeon, fortunately, and not answerable for the humbug of my brethren in other directions. Water and air and sunshine and decent food are the surgeon's usual specifics, and the four things he finds it hardest to secure, — as hard almost for the rich patient as for the poor. The one won't, and the other can't. I have had illustrations of both points this afternoon. I will not talk shop now, but you shall have them both after dinner. At present I want to hear about Deepmouth."

Miss Erminia needed no further word, and for the remainder of the meal gave herself up to delighted "Do you remember?" and "Don't you remember?" Miss Marcia filling in such small spaces as were left at her disposal, while Margaret listened and smiled now and then, and wondered why it all seemed so far back, — farther even than her childhood. A wood fire burned on the hearth in the back parlor, and they gathered about it when they had left the dining-room, Miss Marcia loving the warmth, and contending that every house needed it till July.

"Now let us have the cases," Mrs. Herndon said, as she moved her chair back a little. "We want to understand where the 'won't' and the 'can't' come in."

"One is as plain as the other," Dr. Strothers answered promptly. "Luxury debilitates precisely as thoroughly as the sharpest want. The man who must have not less than half a dozen courses, and whose blood is hot and thick with high living ceases to have much moral muscle, and when the time for self-denial comes is as unable to meet it as a baby. This afternoon I have been looking at my patient who 'won't.' Hurt in a railway accident, to begin with, and only a finger to be taken off. That passes successfully, and he has nothing to do but to live low and be well in no time. He begs for wine and game and what not, and I tell him plainly that he will very probably lose his hand if he does not obey orders. He doesn't agree with me. In short, he 'won't,' and this afternoon I have taken off the hand, and may have to take the arm. Erysipelas set in, and he is paying his price for the four meals a day he sold his hand for. There will always be buyers for the mess of pottage, long as the world stands."

Miss Erminia changed color. The soup had been rich, — too rich, certainly; but then he had eaten it, and she recovered herself.

"There 's a great deal of unnecessary discussion over food," she said energetically. "I am perfectly certain a good many things are harmless that are marked 'dangerous.'"

"Very likely," Dr. Strothers said abstractedly, as Miss Marcia shot an astonished glance at Miss Erminia. "The other case — the 'can't,' you know — I had just come from as I met you," he went on, turning slightly toward Mrs. Herndon. "It is one where money from somebody is the first essential

They are English people, — the father well educated, and with some Government appointment that enabled him to marry a delicate little thing, a curate's daughter, and used to the shortest of commons. There are five little girls, sloping down like John Rogers's children ; and it is the oldest that I went to see this afternoon. Somehow they saved enough to come to this country ; he is a red-hot republican, and they crossed in the steerage in order to have something to live on when they got here. They were robbed on the voyage of all their little fund, which he foolishly enough had in gold. He was too proud to complain ; there was no clew to the thief, and he thought work would be certain as soon as he landed. They went to a boarding-house on West Street, — a wretched den ; pawning everything by degrees ; at last, driven out by a brute of a landlord, took refuge in this basement. An Irishman I know got together some bits of furniture for them, and the unlucky father has shovelled coal or done any job that came to hand and would mean a loaf of bread. The oldest child is nine, — no constitution, and the event has brought on hip disease, incipient for a good while, and abscess in the leg. If he had a trade, there would be some hope ; but he is of good family, — the younger son of some younger son, — willing to do anything, and able to do nothing but his clerking. He tells me that he thinks he could be a gardener ; and I think he could perhaps run a kitchen garden, after he had found out that our climate will do precisely the opposite of anything he would naturally expect from previous experience. They will all die together unless something is done, and they are unanimously of the opinion that that is the best thing that could happen. Barney came over to me — the Irishman who is distracted with his charge, and has gone hungry himself to help them — to ask

if I would not get the child into the hospital. They fought against it at first; but that is accomplished, and she will be taken there in the morning. For the rest, what do you think? There is no time to find out, though, for I must run. I will come in at three on Thursday, and find how it looks to you, if I may."

"They must not be there another hour!" Mrs. Herndon cried impetuously. "He must have money, and at once. Tell him it is a loan from a friend, and that he may pay it back when he is well and at work."

She had taken out her purse and laid some notes in Dr. Strothers's hand.

"I have seen that they are made comfortable for to-night," he said, "and will run in for another look when I go to the other patient. Let the money wait till to-morrow. This is a case that I think you will thank me for leaving entirely in your hands. Good-night. You see I am behind time already." And before another word could be spoken he was gone.

XI.

MISS BIGGS had seated herself on a small three-legged stool in the corner nearest the door leading into Meg's room, and, while she listened for any sudden sound, surveyed Lessing with curious but friendly attention.

"What beats me is the difference between you an' that little black baboon of a man upstairs, you seem to think so much of. I hain't just got hold o' his name, — Hilebrown?" she remarked, after a silence, broken by the sound of a chair moving back overhead. "He ain't related no ways, is he?"

"Like a cousin, you mean?" Lessing answered. "No, it is not so that we are for one another. It is because we are in prison together that we like not to be apart now."

"For the land's sake! You don't neither of you look like you 'd ever been burglars or sich!" returned the startled Miss Biggs. "Him more 'n you; but to look at you I 'd say you would n't know how to break a law if you set out to — too innocent-like. I reckon you 're foolin' me."

"One goes to prison for more than burglary," Lessing said, considering her gravely. "We were patriotic revolutionists, — what you call socialists here. We wanted reform, as you people wanted it when you fought your battles, 1775, 1812, 1861. Those are your dates. Ours are yet to come."

"I hain't much opinion o' fightin'," Miss Biggs said, after some reflection. "I was raised partly with Quakers, when I was n't raisin' myself, an' that's

what I did mostly, an' I 'm free to say their ways are good ways, an' give folks some chance to speak their minds, though I ain't one to hold to their cast-iron notions in other ways. But I 'm jest as certain as they be that you 've got to hark to yourself an' find out what your inside senses says, as you have to hark to common sense outside of you. An' my voice says to me, plain as a church bell, 'Amanda! men an' women, black an' white, rich an' poor, high an' low, is your brothers an' sisters. Don't you be scared by silks an' diamonds an' big houses, an' don't you be discouraged with folks that hain't got one nor the other, but speak your mind to 'em all, an' do 'em a good turn if you 're able. You can't fight with folks if you take 'em that way.'"

Lessing had laid down his work as she spoke. Her idiom baffled him a little. She used words that thus far he had not encountered. But her meaning now was very plain; gray and gaunt, her small eyes having for their chief expression a placid curiosity, and her long face the mildness of some old gray horse dumbly questioning life, he felt, as Mrs. Herndon had done, the essential qualities that lay below. She had been a stranger a week ago, yet to-day took her place calmly as one of the family, home evidently being, as she had remarked, "any place where she hung up her bunnit." He looked at her with kind eyes, and, reaching over, patted the lean, labor-hardened hands that were holding her knee. Miss Biggs looked at him and at them, as if the operation, while not distasteful, was yet quite superfluous.

"It is not many Americans that think as that," Lessing said, still looking at her. "How comes it to you? Because you are poor, as we are?"

"Poverty hain't nothin' to do with it. It 's natur', or the want o' natur'," Miss Biggs said decisively. "You 're poor because you 're a mind to be, an' I 'm

poor because, as I say, there was n't difference enough between Biggs an' Briggs to make me take him, if he was well-to-do. He wanted a nuss chiefly, an' I hain't no opinion of a woman wrastlin' for half a dozen years with Death for a man she ain't no ways partikelar about, an' then endin' off with another wrastle with Jersey law. You don't know nothin' about it. I was born in Jersey, but 't wa'n't my own choice. My folks was from Vermont, so I 've a right to a streak o' Yankee. An' then, bein' an orfant from eleven, an' took in by Jersey folks fust, an' then by Quakers, I know folks's ways an' what things is wuth. An' I 've always been considerin' what things was wuth since I cut my first tooth. An' I 've settled it one way. It 's give an' take, give an' take, an' the one as much as t' other, an' long 's I 'm kept down here for such purposes as come handy, that 's what Amanda means to do. That 's the way you 've ciphered it out too, an' I 've got an opinion o' you that I don't mind mentionin' every time. But him upstairs, scorchin' as a thunder-cloud an' sharper 'n a meat-axe, — what is it he 's up to ? "

" Sit there where you are, or have the door open if you are by our Meg," Lessing said, after a pause for consideration, " and you shall hear what he will say. Then you will have different thoughts."

" 'T ain't words that makes me change up my mind," Miss Biggs said serenely. " Words go down some folks as easy as slip ; but I 've got eyes to look behind 'em, an' it 'll take more 'n words to make me call your Hilebrown anything but a reg'lar snarley-yow."

" That is new, also," Lessing said with interest. " I have not thought there were words as that in your language. How is it you will have so many ? "

" I take what comes, an' if they don't come, I make 'em," Miss Biggs replied.

Lessing laid down his work again.

"But see, now; how shall a language stand if all will do that way? It is a crime to so cumber a speech that must grow of natural growth, — not excrescences to lop away. A word is sacred. It is because men change their meanings, and will fight always for their own, that we know not to-day what is the heart of any real word. Old words, all words, are yours, but never the word your own mind will think."

"For gracious sakes!" Miss Biggs began; but she heard herself called, and rose hastily. "You an' I hain't got through," she said, putting her head out for a moment, as she closed the door. "A free-born American 's got a right to say what he pleases, how he pleases, so long 's there ain't no one hurt by it. I reckon it 's better to boss a language than be bossed by it, an' I 'll prove it to you too." And with a defiant nod, Miss Biggs closed the door.

Lessing shook his head distractedly. This was anarchy of the worst nature, and demanded active measures; yet how should one deal with a mind that had never heard of philology, and regarded the dictionary as an obstruction? "Ach, Gott!" he said; "what is woman but incarnate revolution?" And, pondering this question, he turned to his work again, to lay it down presently and light the lamps for the evening assembling. Felix had come in an hour before, eaten his supper, and, as usual, curled up by his mother, whom he watched as if she might suddenly again be taken from him. Miss Biggs he had accepted, after prolonged and serious inspection, as a mysterious but friendly guardian, whose personal presence would probably frighten away any one who came with evil intent. He stole out presently, divining in his own fashion that the hour was near in which Heilbrun came down for the evening chat, and gave a little skip as he saw Dr.

Strothers entering. Here was some one whose face drew him, and into whose hand his own had stolen, as he stood by him at his first visit. For a week the doctor had come in every evening about seven. Meg had fallen into a low fever, from which she was now beginning to rally, and the meeting of the preceding Wednesday had been postponed. To-night she had begged that everything might go on just as usual, and Miss Biggs had signified her approbation. She had been told the secret of Meg's fear and apprehension, and on the instant constituted herself the fiercest of defenders.

"Amanda's still," she said. "You need n't ever worry for fear she 'll talk it out, but there ain't a man in the universe she would n't send flyin' if it was worth while to. You be easy. Stop starin' at the door, an' I 'll attend to things."

Dr. Strothers sat down by Meg. The resemblance he had been puzzling over was plainer than ever to-night. Her hair had loosened and fell about her face, no longer wearing the calm he had noted in his glimpses of it months ago, but a perplexed sadness,— a fear he did not understand. It was like, and yet unlike, the girl face, with its sombre eyes and fixed and brooding silence, that had haunted him for weeks as he came and went in the hospital ward. He had reproached himself then that he had not made her speak. Meg was dozing as he entered, and he sat down softly, studying the face as he had wished to do, and smiling as she opened her eyes suddenly, the look of terror passing into one of relief as he smiled at her. Meg shrunk away a little. She had seen the question in his eyes, and dreaded its finding voice. Yet to-night something urged her to answer it. He was a friend. He could help to save Felix, perhaps, if in any way Gid should find her and make his claim. In her strange and unaccustomed weak-

ness it seemed as if death could not be far away. Miss Biggs assured her that she was almost well; but if this were true, why did her hands feel so heavy and her head so light? She looked at Dr. Strothers, her deep, sorrowful eyes meeting his in a long gaze, in which his own changed also, from the quiet friendliness of the first glance to a sudden gleam of recognition.

"Never mind," he said quickly, but most gently. "You remember me, I see; but that makes no difference for either of us, except that I 'm glad you are alive. I did not think that Felix was one of my babies. Some are namesakes and some not, but I know how it goes with most of them. There, poor child! Why should you cry?"

"Because you are so good," Meg said brokenly. "I was going to tell you myself, before I saw that you knew. And now I want to tell you just as much, because you must know about Felix, and you must know how Berthold has saved me."

"Tell me anything you want to, and nothing that you do not," Dr. Strothers said; and Meg, who wondered how it could be that with him she felt as strangely drawn to tell the whole, to spare nothing, as she had done when she hid her face from the clear eyes that had seemed to look on her always since childhood, told the old, sad story. Miss Biggs looked in once, and withdrew suddenly; and Felix stole in again, and nestled against the broad breast as Dr. Strothers drew him to his knees. His eyes were wet when she ended, and he leaned forward and took her hand.

"Forget it all, poor child!" he said; "you have only to get well, — to come to yourself again. It is a miracle, but why should one wonder? The black drop is gone; you have only to go on."

"The black drop," Meg repeated. "Berthold called

it that, long ago. He said the soul had been hidden, not killed, and I must learn how to free it from all its bandages. I understood him. I meant to do it, but now I am back again where he found me."

"Never!" Dr. Strothers said, so earnestly that Felix felt it, and started and looked up at him. "Never! Not one atom of this miserable time puts you back, but forward! Never speak of it again. Remember nothing but that, if mud was in the beginning, a lily has sprung from it, white and wonderful. God loved you, and would not leave you in the dark. Think how much you must have been needed, to be led out so, and how much there is to do!"

"God?" Meg repeated. "It was God and Christ that Jerry talked about."

"Jerry?"

"Yes; the place I went into, you know. He said he should come here again, because I dared not go there. They help every one in trouble. And he was in prison once. You would not believe it if you saw him. He felt to me better than anybody but Berthold and Mrs. Herndon that night, but I had never heard of some of the things he said. Sometimes I think I would like to go there again, and find out what they meant."

"Find out how to get well first," Dr. Strothers said, a little abstractedly. "When you are yourself again, you will not need to ask questions of that sort. These people have good points, of course, but they are almost certain to fall back into old ways," he had nearly added, but checked himself. Let Meg keep her grateful impression untarnished by any doubt. To her the people were all she thought, and that was enough. That they were relying on a false system — exciting feeling, but never action, and living in a cloud of cant and mere sentiment — was probably

the correct statement for this, as it had been for one and another form of the same work of which he had had some knowledge. It was fortunate that Meg was in wiser hands, and coming naturally, quietly into full possession of the real self she might else have never known.

"One true life is worth all the sermons ever preached, and all the systems of morality from the foundation of the world," he thought. "Lessing has nothing to say of systems. He simply gives himself from day to day, and here, in this woman and child, is but one of how many witnesses to his insight, and his simple faith in the best! 'The best is the true.'"

Felix put his hand up, and stroked his cheek, and Dr. Strothers looked at him with the gentle eyes he had for all want or suffering.

"He hardly misses speech," he thought. "After all, it is best to have him as he is, perhaps. It saves him from some possibilities of his inheritance." He put the child down, and went out to the shop. Lessing had closed the shutters as usual, that no passer-by might be tempted to come in; and Heilbrun, already in his place behind the table, nodded silently as Dr. Strothers sat down among a knot of men, talking excitedly, all of whose faces he knew, and who had come to recognize him as a friend, or, if not a friend, one who wished to learn such definitions of life as they had to give.

Miss Biggs sat near the inner door, some mending for Felix on the table at her side, and looked calmly at one and another, as she wove in a new heel to a small stocking. Two or three Germans had been speaking in their own language, but turned as a dark, lank man rose from his chair with a bound.

"What are you going to do?" he cried. "What are you going to do? I 've been about to your clubs, your protective unions, your brotherhoods, your what

not. How far ahead are you? Numbers don't help. You twenty that sit round here to-night, every one of you with brains and a tongue, have more power than two thirds of the whiners that rise up and say it 's all wrong, but they don't see the way out. They told me at one place that here you had some sense. You were n't Americans born, though I see some faces I 'd swear are American; but you wrote and got the chance to be heard. What use is the row among ourselves if those that should listen won't? What use is my telling and talking if I can't reach one that will pass the story on? I 've come to-day from a man that listened to me, — a sly fox of a lawyer that knew I 'd been round among the mills, and wanted to see what a dangerous character was like that set the men up to strikes. He was polite, oh, yes! — said he wanted to talk with me as friend to friend. Wanted to understand my ground, and why I complained. 'Hours are shorter, wages better,' he said; 'if you knew anything about mill life across the water, you 'd see that every mill-hand in the country has ten chances where the other has one. What 's the row? Speak it out!' 'You 're the lawyer for a big corporation,' I said; 'you have charge of the affairs of two of the biggest mills in the country. You know, as well as I do, their hours and the wages they pay. I 've been in every print and cotton mill in New England. I know, and you know, that they 're child-killers, women-killers! The best of them are hells. I 've come from one of the best this week, — a factory eight hundred feet long, and swarming with children from eight to twelve. They were paid from ten to fifteen cents a day, and they work twelve hours to get it! In the next town the pay was the same, but the time eleven hours instead of twelve. They had houses to live in, — the fathers that could make sometimes a dollar a day (a dollar and a

quarter, if they were machinists), but that averaged eighty-seven cents. They were better off than before they came there; there were hundreds to take their places if they struck for less hours and more pay; yet you know that there, and all over this cursed land you call free, they are bond-slaves, and no hope for soul and body. That 's the row. I want a chance for every working man, woman, and child to own themselves. I ain't alone. There 's hundreds boiling over as I am, and I swear to you the explosion ain't far off, and that your owners will be shot down like dogs if they won't hear reason.' That 's what I said to him; and I said it quiet as a lamb, to let him know it was n't bluster. And he says to me, and not a change in his cursed face, 'See here, my good man; you are quite in earnest, and I admit that on the face of it things look hard. But you know as well as I do that in this country every man starts with a fair and equal chance. You know as well as I do that all society is divided into capables and incapables, and that the capables have the right to be guarded against the encroachments of the incapables. These mills support a school and a church. We admit that every child deserves, and should have, a practical education. After that the matter is in his own hands. If he does n't succeed, he does n't deserve to succeed. To help him by money, or shortening hours, or dividing profits, or any of this nonsense you advocate, is simply to encourage idleness and pauperism. Open your eyes, my friend, and you will see that this is the result of what you cry for. I advise you, if you don't want to find yourself suddenly put where you can't be heard, to consider my words. You 're a lunatic; and you know where lunatics belong.' I 'd put in some words here and there before he said this; he winced under them; he did n't like them, — smooth, lying

devil, going home to his wine and his big dinner, and the whole of it ground out of human souls! I tell you, if you don't rise and slay these men where they sit, you deserve all you get, and more!"

A murmur of approbation went round the room as the speaker sat down, wiping his forehead and waving away impatiently the mug of beer pushed toward him.

"I want my wits, such as they are, unfuddled," he said. "How 's a man to see through the fumes you live in? You walk in a fog of your own raising, every one of you. Tell me, if you can, if one here sees his way out to anything that can help a solitary soul." He looked around as he spoke, his eyes searching the faces of every one. "You can all bluster and tell your tale of a wrong you may know; but where is your action? The time is ripe. To destroy must be the watchword."

"And what then?" said Heilbrun's deep voice.

"Equal division, equal rights; the golden age for every son of man. The rich are a curse. Take their money from them. Let them learn to labor; and if they will not, let them do as their betters have done, — starve!"

"You are too fast, too fierce, my friend," Heilbrun said. "You delay what you would hasten. What good to these masses is your equal division, if they know not what money can do? Destruction must come. We wait for that, but not till our masses have learned what they need. Emancipation begins for the few. It is for them to react on the remainder. It is the rich who must be reached and taught that through them is the sole emancipation for those through whom their riches have come. It is the incapables that have hoisted up the capables. No man, boast as he may, has been the sole architect of his fortune. No; the free gifts of the past to the

present have been his stepping-stones. Industrial knowledge, energy, and skill have come to him from the innumerable minds before him; they are part of his capital. He borrows from them, and must pay the debt to the present. To reach him is our work to-day."

Lessing looked up in surprise. These were moderate words from the fiery Heilbrun, who at times had declared the torch the chief agent in bringing in a new civilization. The stranger's fury had for the moment altered his standpoint, and helped him to the moderation that had had no place in speech or methods. Dr. Strothers sat silent, his eyes fixed on the fierce, dark face of the first speaker, — a fanatic in every fibre, all self-consciousness lost in the burning zeal that consumed him. Ill-fitting clothes hung loosely on the gaunt figure, long-armed and loose-jointed. His deep-set, melancholy eyes looked out from beetling brows; and his head, curiously high above the ears, with forehead as high, but pinched in at the temples, showed at a glance the stuff of which he was made.

"A little more back-head, and the added flesh that would mean," Dr. Strothers said to himself, "would make him a practical instead of a theoretical philanthropist. As it is, he is of the same stuff that has made martyrs and confessors since time began. He would cut my throat cheerfully if he felt that thereby the cause was advantaged. Half-way measures are as impossible for him as for Niagara."

An angry debate had been roused by Heilbrun's words, and the stranger's eyes sparkled as he saw the effect they had produced. A dozen were speaking at once; and though Heilbrun rapped imperatively for silence, no one heeded him. He smiled sardonically as he leaned back and surveyed his followers, temporarily beside themselves under this new influence.

The man had power, it was certain. After all, he was not so far wrong; and it was Lessing's thought that had suddenly spoken through him, rather than his own. He listened as the arraignment of the rich went on, till the words were but curses, and the men sprang up as if that moment must see them on their way with torch and bullet. The stranger smiled. This was the sort of effect words should have, and no words that did not stir men's souls to instant action were words at all. Lessing had risen, and looked anxiously at Heilbrun.

"Brothers!" he cried. "My brothers! the master is right. There he sits; he who has given his life for his thought. Listen to him!"

"And I say listen to me," said the voice of Miss Biggs, as she suddenly placed herself in the doorway. "I 've got a word for you folks that are all goin' off the handle together; an', being raised by Quakers, it ain't strange that I think I 've got just as good a right to speak as you, if I am a woman. Listen to me, I say!"

The groups fell apart, faced about, and considered Miss Biggs in amazement too profound for words.

"I 've always wanted a chance to say my say out about some things," pursued the undismayed speaker, "an' now seems to me about as good a time as it 's likely to be. I 've been lookin' round an' gittin' the sense o' you, and Amanda 's kerrect every time when she gives her mind to it. You talk an' act like a passel o' fools, an' yit every livin' soul here to-night ain't a common, hard-workin', slow-thinkin' man, that don't see more 'n two inches ahead, but men that 's had all the eddication there is, from Mr. Hilebrown up an' down. Eddication ain't sense, an' the longer I live the better I know it; an' nobody knows it any better 'n you, Jared Slocum."

The stranger started, and then shook his head impatiently. "Amanda Biggs, what brought thee here

thyself knows best, but thee can't silence the truth, and there was a time when thee would have suffered for it."

"I was n't any more ready then than I be now," Miss Biggs said with a nod. "You 've dropped the Quaker mostly, and it 's well you have, considerin' that you 're bent on blowin' up the hull of creation that don't suit you. What I mean to say is this: you know, an' I know, that Mr. Hilebrown there spoke the livin' truth. There 's rich folks an' rich folks; an' if there 's pison-mean ones, there 's ones that are as free as sunshine, an' jest live to spill out comfortableness. We know such a one here, an' she knows more, an' it 's our business to show up the case the way it is to them, and not set men to cuttin' their throats because they 've got a little more 'n looks jest fair. Human natur' is human natur'; an' if you can once drive it into anybody's head that to give is better than to hang on, they 'll begin to give. I say, money ain't any more a gift than life, an' you 've got to know how to use 'em both before you can get anything out of 'em that amounts to much. Tearin' down a rich man's house ain't goin' to build you one, an' burnin' up his books ain't goin' to put the sense in them into the heads that does it. I say you 've got to settle down to hard pan, and make up your minds that the world won't be made over this year. We 've got to work, — work our fingers off, if the pinch comes, — but we 've got to wait too; an' let me tell you, the work 's in your own houses, an' not rearin' an' tearin' up an' down the streets. Instead o' howlin' for a revolt, an' a war, an' the Lord knows what, mend your own ways, and help your neighbor to mend his. I ain't sayin' things ain't in a muddle, for they be; but they 're gettin' better instead o' worse, an' you know it. When every man makes up his mind to do the best he knows how, an' does it, the way opens out like the story says it

opened through the Red Sea. I ain't no ways partikelar whether that 's true or not; but, sure 's you 're born, it 's so for every man that ever lived that was a mind to do his duty up an' down, no matter what. The rich ain't worse than the poor, an' the poor ain't worse than the rich. You can't stop 'em being kind an' free-handed with one another, even when you pile 'em in ten deep into rooms where there ought n't to be more 'n two. There 's got to be teachin' all round." Miss Biggs paused a moment, and wiped her forehead with the red stocking she had waved at intervals in her discourse. Surprise had passed into acquiescence, and every eye was fixed upon her.

"Folks's heads is mostly like houses," she continued, with a nod toward Heilbrun, — "more or less rooms in 'em accordin' to the amount the owner 's wuth. Not but what there 's rich ones with mighty narrer quarters now an' then, but that ain't the point. What I 'm gettin' at is, you men with plenty o' rooms, chuck full o' good furnishin', board 'em up, an' live in a long, narrer entry that won't hold but one idee to time, an' that one has to go out the back door before a new one can git in at the front. One idee won't run a man anywheres but to destruction. It 's good enough for a sudden pull or a hard scrimmage, an' Jared Slocum, there, proves it. He 's fit slave-drivers, an' sold the coat off his back to git a meal o' vittles for a hungry nigger, an' he 's hed his eyes on the seamy side o' things till he can't believe there 's a pretty good-lookin' pattern on the other. You men go home an' think it over, an' don't you take no man's word for law an' gospel till you 've tried to see if there ain't another side."

Miss Biggs backed suddenly into the bedroom and shut the door, from which the red stocking emerged for a hasty wave typical of her friendly feelings. Dr. Strothers, shaking silently with suppressed laughter,

made his way out, nodding to Heilbrun, who wore a shamefaced expression against which he struggled, and which was shared by Lessing, who had in the beginning laughed silently, yet looked now with a little anxiety at the group preparing to leave.

"It is one who will have her way," he said. "She is a good woman; she means no harm."

Slocum had risen, and was looking intently at Lessing. No smile had come to his dark face, to which all smiles were strange. Free speech for women as for men was a part of his creed, and opposition meant only fuel for his flame.

"I shall come to you again," he said. "You men who write and are heard when you speak must see with my eyes; and you shall, if you are men, and not guzzling dreamers." And without further look or word, he shook off Lessing's detaining hand, and was gone.

XII.

"IT's the same man," Miss Erminia said excitedly,— "the very same man ! I knew something more would happen. I could n't be the only one."

"What do you mean, Erminia?" Miss Marcia asked, with some severity, picking up the article she had dropped as Miss Erminia startled her.

"I did n't mention it, Marcia, because I did n't know what to think. It was so sudden that it made me feel as if really I must be guilty; and yet you know I never ground the face of the poor, and never would if I knew it. And so, to be faced as if I was — what was that queen's name that always wanted everything, you know? not Messalina — never mind; but he made me feel like that more than anything."

Miss Marcia sat down and looked fixedly at Miss Erminia, who held out the paper she had been reading.

"No; wait, Marcia, — you have n't your glasses on. It 's here somewhere. I 'll read it: 'An exciting scene occurred yesterday as Mr. Stewart was leaving his uptown store after his customary morning examination. The well-known Socialist and demagogue, Jared Slocum, who has not been heard from for some time, stopped him as he was passing down the steps, and proceeded to denounce him as a monopolist and a grinder of the face of the poor. A crowd collected; and as the irrepressible Slocum shrieked, "Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-

eaten; your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire!" a policeman appeared, and was on the point of arresting him, had not Mr. Stewart refused to make complaint. Jared seems to have broken out in a new place, and we shall probably hear of similar interviews with our millionnaires, until he finds his proper home in a lunatic asylum.' That's the man, Marcia, and the very words, almost, that he said to me; only I must say he did n't shriek."

"What were you doing, Erminia, that should make a strange man speak to you?"

"I was coming out of Tiffany's. I 'd been in just to get a watch-key, and I stopped a minute to look in the window, — a ship in full sail, in silver, for a prize, I suppose, in some yacht race, — and he stopped a minute, too, and looked at it, and everybody that was looking too, and then just fixed his eyes on me and said — I 'm sure I don't know what, only all he did to poor Mr. Stewart. But it sent cold chills down my spine, the way he looked at me, and it does every time I think of it. There 's the door! I do hope Margaret has come in."

Miss Erminia slipped out to the hall, and leaned cautiously over the balusters — a habit severely reprobated by Miss Marcia — and listened. Simmons was in active conversation with some one, and evidently not disposed to admit the visitor.

"I don't say she would, an' I don't say she would n't," his voice sounded at last, a despairing inflection in it that indicated a conflict of some sort. "She done tole me when she went out she was n't goin' to see no more folks to-day, an' you can come to-morrow."

"An' I say I ain't folks, nor never was, but plain Amanda, that she 'll see, an' you 'll see she 'll see.

You 've done your duty, an' I hain't nothin' to say; an' now I 'll come in an' set awhile, an' you can 'tend to whatever you like."

Miss Erminia descended the stairs swiftly. This was certainly the electric doctor of whom Margaret had spoken, and an opportunity it would be almost criminal to neglect. She opened the door of the reception-room; and Miss Biggs turned eagerly, her face falling a little as she saw a stranger. She courtesied, — the little bob learned in her youth, — and stood examining Miss Erminia, who, now that she was in the room, wished that she had been less hasty. However, singular as the person's appearance was, it could hardly be counted more so than that of the Metaphysical Metamorphosis expounder, and she gathered courage to speak.

"Perhaps you 're not, but I thought you were when I came down. Are you the electric doctor that Mrs. Herndon told me about?"

"She ain't likely to know more 'n one, not bein' in that line," Miss Biggs returned, "an' I suppose I be. But I don't use it permiscuous, ever. It 's a gift; an' when I find folks that 's in real need, I give it jest as it comes, free as water, — freer 'n water is in this pesky city, where everything has a tax on it but lyin' an' cheatin'."

"How does it work?" Miss Erminia inquired with profound interest. "Do you suppose it would do me any good?"

"I suppose most anything would do you good that you took a fancy to for the time bein'," Miss Biggs answered reflectively. "You 're made that way. You 'd try fire and brimstone if anybody came along an' said it was the latest kind o' tonic. It 's a tonic I 'd be pleased to try on some o' the folks I 've seen this afternoon," she added, with a decisive nod. "I ain't out o' my head. You look kind o' skeered,

but you need n't be. I sense folks sometimes the minute I set eyes on 'em, and I sensed you when I saw you comin' in. I knowed you was one o' the family, an' I knowed you 'd been doctorin', an' was likely to keep on."

Miss Erminia looked at her with delighted interest. "That 's exactly what I 've been wanting to find,— some one that had real discernment, and could tell me the seat of the difficulty. I 've been disappointed so often; but, with a gift like yours, I suppose you know in a minute. Now let me tell you just what I 've been doing, here and in the other places, and how I 'm beginning to feel about it, and then you can give me your views."

"I 'm agreeable," Miss Biggs said, with a glance toward the door; and Miss Erminia, her cheeks flushed and her eyes bright with excitement at the new possibility before her, told the tale of her successive ailments, her pursuit of health, and her conviction that only extraordinary measures could meet so baffling and perplexing a case.

"It 's miraculous that you should have seen it in a moment," she said at last. "I wish you would tell me how you do it. I would give anything to see through anybody that way."

"You 'll have to peel for a good long spell before you 'll come to it," Miss Biggs said calmly. "Your kind gets so wrapped up in their own ailments an' their own thoughts o' themselves, there 's as many layers round their souls as an onion, an' it 's jest about as pleasant to peel 'em off. I ain't sayin' I don't own enough o' my own, but I 've *had* to peel, an' you have n't, an' I was started out with my gifts, anyway. You don't want doctorin'. You want to go to work."

Miss Erminia grew very red, but Miss Biggs paid no attention to the rising indignation in her face.

"What I mean to say is, that you 're jest like two thirds o' the women that 's got money enough to take life easy; instead o' turnin' to, an' findin' out what there is to do for folks, you turn right in on yourselves, an' a new pain or a flutteration somewhere 's jest so much clear gain. You won't let your insides go along, unconscious like, the way they 'd ought to, but you fret 'em an' worry 'em till you 've upset 'em enough to keep you busy the rest o' your life. An' then you fly round 'mongst the doctors, an' that 's the way they live. Ain't there folks enough goin' to the devil for want o' help? Ain't there children enough that are a-waitin' to be started on different from their fathers and mothers? Ain't there enough for every livin' soul to do that 's got money an' got time, every minute long 's they 're on the earth? You 're a nice woman, that 's easy enough to see, but, lawful heart! you hain't never took hold. You won't want no doctorin' when you do; an' my advice is, stop doctorin' an' go at somethin' that 'll bear mentionin' when you 've gone on into the next spere, an' folks ask you what you 've been about, an' what kind of a house you 've been buildin' for yourself over there. You asked what my views was. Them 's my views, an' I 'd like to put 'em stronger."

Miss Erminia turned and fled, the amazed Simmons, as he saw her rush through the hall, putting his head into the reception-room and eying Miss Biggs with deep suspicion. Mrs. Herndon had come in, and being told that Miss Erminia had chosen to see the stranger, had gone up to her room; but came out as Miss Erminia, breathless and panting, sank down on a chair in the upper hall.

"I consider her a lunatic, Margaret. It is n't safe for you to see her alone," she gasped. "No, I shall not repeat what she said. It was extremely impertinent, and I should not suppose you would allow

me to be insulted in your own house. I shall lie down immediately; and I doubt if I am able to go down to dinner after such a shock."

Miss Erminia rose with dignity and locked herself in her own room; and Margaret, after an instant's hesitation, went down, to find no token of conflict in Miss Biggs's face.

"You 're a sight for sore eyes any time," she said approvingly, "an' I 've got considerable to say that would n't keep; or if it would, I was that stirred up it seemed as if it could n't. You ain't put out, be ye?"

"What have you been saying to my cousin?" Mrs. Herndon asked seriously.

"Not half that I had ought to have said, when she give me the chance," returned Miss Biggs, with equal seriousness. "When folks ask you to tell 'em your views in full, you tell, don't you?"

"It depends on the person."

"Well, that 's the way I looked at it; an' I said to myself, 'They 're all tender of her, an' more 'n likely no one 's spoken the truth to her once since she was born. I ain't any account anyway, an' I 'll do it an' clear my conscience.' I was n't nigh through, when she turned an' run; but I 'd said enough to give her somethin' to think about. Not that she 'll think, but you can't never tell who 'll think an' who won't. You would n't call me a thinker, maybe, to look at me."

Mrs. Herndon smiled involuntarily.

"There, I told you so! An' that 's the way most anybody 'd look at it. An' yet I 'm free to say there ain't a woman, in Jersey or out, that 's done more studyin' over things, or made up her mind any clearer about a good many of 'em. I 've made it up ag'in to-day over some points, an' I 've got 'em down on a piece o' paper."

Miss Biggs produced a torn yellow envelope from her pocket. "It 's got the numbers on it you asked me to get, — the folks in a room, an' the folks on a floor, an' the folks in the houses, both of them. It 's a bad-smellin' job as ever I undertook, — cussin' an' swearin' all round, enough to make the air blue. Some thought I was a Bible-reader, an' cussed me for a Protestant; an' some thought I was an agent just spyin' round, an' cussed me for not mindin' my own business. 'Cuss away,' I says. 'I 'm here to try an' make things better for you, an' 't would n't be carryin' out things the way they go in this world if you did n't cuss.' That puzzled 'em, an' they sort o' follered round to see what I 'd do next. When I went down to the saloon underneath, an' I says, 'I want to know the owner o' these houses,' 'You can go to his agent for what you want,' the man says, starin' at me. Down Sixth Avenue. He told me the number, and down I went, — a little red-headed Irishman, with eyes as pink as a weasel; an' I skirmished with him half an hour before he 'd tell me who they belonged to. The factory an' the two houses are one an' the same man's; an' his name 's Herbert Byington Longshore, an' his house is up on Madison Avenue."

"Good Heavens!" Margaret cried. She had turned pale, and rose hastily from her chair.

Miss Biggs nodded. "I sort of suspicioned you 'd know him. Now, the thing is to tackle him; an' long 's I 'm in the business I 'm a mind to go on. It 's your work I 'm doin', an' your money I 'm handlin'; an' it 's for you to say what more you 'd like. You 've stirred up enough. It 's time now to stir up somebody else; an' you won't find a livelier puddin'-stick nowheres than Amanda Biggs, that might 'a' been Briggs."

Miss Biggs folded her hands and waited, an expression of voluntary and meritorious abnegation

resting for a moment on her face, then dismissed personal considerations and watched Mrs. Herndon's perplexed expression.

"Life 's a chore," she said; "an' chores has to be done when the time 's due, or you pay for it."

Simmons opened the door at this moment, and looked inquiringly at Mrs. Herndon. "It 's Dr. Strothers, ma'am. He said he did n't expect to find you, ma'am, but took his chances, like."

"Then I 'll go on home an' see if Meg 's gettin' on all right," Miss Biggs said briskly. "I 've got to treat that little Englishwoman too. She 's comin' up as easy as camomile after you 've trod on it. 'T won't take long to get 'em all going, an' I reckon they 'll turn to an' do their own share before you know it. An' till they do, I 'm a-goin' to use my gifts with every one o' them. They 're straightenin' out that poor soul that 's most scared out o' her senses, an' I ain't sure they ever will all come back the way they 'd ought to, an' they 'll straighten every time when it 's laid out that they should."

Miss Biggs hastened away, nodding approvingly to Dr. Strothers, who stood in the library door, and came forward now, holding out his hand as Mrs. Herndon came toward him.

"The threads are drawing in," he said. "Who could have thought that the child for whose sake you spent that afternoon in the old corn-house and the hospital patient I used to watch and wonder over were one and the same with this wonderful Meg who has told me all her story? I hold my breath with thinking what may happen next."

There were many meanings in the look he bent upon her, the chief one instantly repressed, and leaving no sign in the friendly eyes that met hers frankly. There had been trouble in her own; but for the moment it vanished, and pleasure took its place.

"It is a wonderful happening," she said. "I sit and look at her, and try to find the wild child I knew behind those sorrowful eyes, and say to myself over and over, —

> 'The threads our hands in blindness spin,
> No self-determined plan weaves in;
> The shuttle of the unseen powers
> Works out a pattern not as ours.'

This is falling into poetry unawares, but it tells the story better than I can. Is n't she beautiful?"

"Yes, and a rare type. She is southern Italian. Not a hint of New England about her."

"On the contrary. Don't you know that brunette, and not blonde, is the New England type?"

"Where comes in the Anglo-Saxon then? You 're forgetting what your English emigrants sprung from."

"I know that out from those Lincolnshire fens came anything but blond Saxons. They were dark men — atrabilious temperaments — is n't that the word? Blondes are not reformers and protesters. They are good fighters, plenty of surface feeling; but intensity and steady force look out from dark eyes, not from blue."

"This is paralyzing. Where have you found such theories?"

"In Boston State House, studying old portraits, sombre, swarthy, melancholy, — in short, brunette."

"Brunette from time, not from inherent constitution. I contend that New England was settled by blondes."

"If it had been, there would have been no Salem witchcraft, and it would have been cavalier, not puritan. All the deepest superstitions of the world begin with the dark brethren. I discover it for the past and know it for the present. How, I will tell you some other day Meg is beautiful, as you say, and

she will be more so. I look upon her as a demonstration of what I believe more and more."

"And what is that?"

Dr. Strothers's eyes were fixed on her face. For a moment care had been laid aside. The girlish look had come back; the dimples that played in the soft cheeks, and that seldom had shown themselves in these later days, were plain.

"Life has only begun for her, after all," Dr. Strothers thought. "I wonder—"

What he wondered was lost in listening.

"I mean that her case is only one where there might be many, if the same methods were tried. We have come to feel heredity a fate, and inevitable as fate; yet her inheritance is outgrown. Why should it not be for all? I am not sanguine as you are, yet I have faith."

"How do you know I am sanguine?"

"Because you are blond, and because your works speak you so."

"They tell the truth for the depths, then, but not for the surface. I was born the victim of ups and downs, and am learning only to keep on a level. But I believe some things tremendously, and that is always a balance wheel."

"I wish I knew precisely what to believe," Mrs. Herndon said, with a faint sigh, the trouble coming back to her eyes. They had sat down near the long table, and she looked up almost appealingly to Dr. Strothers, who had leaned back in his chair as if tired.

"Suppose we have our promised talk," he said. "That is what I came for, though I find it very charming to talk at will. I ought to have been here before, but this is the first hour I have been really free for three days. I hope you had my note telling you why I could not keep our appointment for

yesterday. In the mean time, what do you think of your new charges? Perhaps it would be more in order to tell what they think of you."

Mrs. Herndon shook her head.

"That can wait. It has been a successful week so far as they are concerned, but I am in deeper waters than ever over everything."

"Suppose you tell me just how these months have gone," Dr. Strothers said, his eyes resting on her troubled face. "I had the promise of it, you know."

"Yes, and I have been waiting to keep it; but you will only laugh at my wanderings and my folly in general," she said, "and you may. I think the only point I am absolutely certain upon is what I don't want to do. What I do want is still nebulous. Summer is almost here, and I am no surer than I was the first of December where my path must lie, though, strangely enough, it seems shaping itself a little in the hands of this curious woman, who appears convinced that she has a mission for all of us. You shall have it all."

Mrs. Herndon was silent a moment or two, and then went over the story of the winter: her determined search for personal knowledge, — her growing sense that whatever necessary place in the social economy institutions might fill, it was not in or for them that her own life could be spent.

"It seems the wildest presumption to say that I do not believe in them," she went on. "I mean in the myriad of asylums and reformatories and the places where children are dealt with. Hospitals and homes are another matter. But with the children it is the individual you want to develop, and how can a spark remain when you are brought up one of a squad? It does not seem to be considered a possibility to try any other method; yet I feel instinctively that better ways are open, though I am too ignorant

and inexperienced to tell what. Mrs. Featherstone said, yesterday, that she had tried various orphans as waitresses, and that she would prefer the rawest Swede from Castle Garden to the most highly recommended girl from an asylum. 'They seem to have no adaptiveness,' she said. 'The law of the unexpected is family law, and wits are sharpened in facing perpetual small emergencies, whereas in these Homes, and so on, routine is inflexible, and the child hardens in it like a fly in amber, and never gets out.' Certainly there is something wrong about the whole system."

"What would you substitute?"

"Individual action for each individual. Mr. Brace has the secret, in part. He sends his boys and girls West, to whoever is willing to take them in. Now, imagine the revenue of one of these great institutions paid out to sensible farmers' wives anywhere, East or West, — the sum that the orphan costs here each year turned over to her. Don't you suppose a hundred homes would open where one does now?"

"Yes; and the thing become a systematic course of getting as much and giving as little as is the effect always where you work for something out of sight. The Government clerk can never care for his work in the same degree as he who has personal relations with an employer. Irresponsibility would ruin your system."

"But, properly carried out, there should be inspectors, and a bureau for complaints, and all that would be needed. Oh! I am not making a plan. It baffles me, wears me out when I try to make myself sure of what is best. I am beginning to feel that I will neither question nor scheme any longer. I will just do whatever comes. There are plenty of people for regular channels. It seems to grow clearer that I am for irregular ones. I have turned away seven

subscription hunters in the last three days. The institutions can take care of themselves. Do you think I am right?"

Mrs. Herndon's pauses had grown longer and longer between each statement, as if, with each, some conclusion were reached in her own mind.

"Let us shake hands," Dr. Strothers said, springing up from his chair, and laughing at the surprised look bent upon him. "I have n't been defending institutions. On the contrary, I wanted your view, and would abolish every orphan asylum in the land, if the time were ripe for it. Institutionalism dominating individualism is the story of the world. No matter how beautiful the thought that in the beginning gave them birth, the instant it takes form in brick and stone and mortar, that moment the thought begins to turn to brick and stone and mortar also. The founder's life may act as solvent for a time; but no matter how perfect the administration of wishes or methods, the soul dies."

"It is comfortable to have you of the same mind," Mrs. Herndon said, smiling to herself as he threw back his head, with the very gesture she remembered, as he looked up at her from the log that summer afternoon in Byington woods. "Naturally, I supposed you would be on the side of corporations, and anything long established and certain in its results."

"There is the difficulty. There is no certainty but uncertainty. Protection becomes extinction before you know where you are. Think of the thought that founded one of those old monasteries, — the safeguard, the helper and healer it was meant to be. Can you imagine anything fairer than one of those old English abbeys, — every line a poem, set in green meadows and corn lands, the pigeons flying about its towers; and in every hut of serf or thrall the sense that there was their stronghold, — the one spot where

justice was certain and love a law? And then, as the thought that formed it ceases to live, crusts over, vanishes, you have your fat, lazy, blackguard monks preying on rich and poor alike, but the poor most of all. That is institutionalism, from the foundation of the world till now. Heaven deliver us from settling into those ruts, and Heaven help us to deal with the swarms that are rising among us like flies in Egypt."

"That is what I began to feel as my list went on," said Mrs. Herndon, pointing to a thick blank book lying on the table. "It is really a directory to all the charities of the city, with my own word of comment regarding it. At first, as I saw it growing, I looked at it with a glow of satisfaction. There was not a want of the poor from childhood to old age that was not defined and met; love and pity and protection reaching out to the sick, the orphaned, the old, and even the lowest and most debased, who need such help as comes from organized and sustained effort. Very beautiful; the whole of it — the result of a most tender and lovely compassion, but — "

Mrs. Herndon paused. "It will sound pragmatic, unpleasant, like chronic dissatisfaction with existing conditions, if I speak exactly what comes."

"Speak it, all the same."

"It feels as if there were positive complacency in the way we look at this always increasing array of paupers and criminals, drunkards, lunatics, and idiots. 'See how we provide for our helpless classes!' is the cry going up from civilization everywhere. That it must be is taken to be an essential fact; as much a part of natural law as sunrise or the ebbing and flowing of tides. And yet, as I look at it, in some better day, far remote still, the poor must cease to be, in any form including squalor, crime, and sharp

bodily need. Inequality in condition is inevitable, — a natural law never to be set aside; but grinding poverty has no right to existence. But I don't know — I see no method of suppression yet."

"Don't you? Then you have not looked in the right direction," Dr. Strothers said earnestly. "I agree with you entirely, that we cannot stop working so long as poverty rules. The work of the men and women of this generation must of necessity be chiefly in charitable lines; but for the children, whose life is just begun, there is a different and better possibility. Organized charities meet the first need. Industrial education must meet the second."

"What do you mean, exactly?"

"The giving a handicraft of some nature to every boy and girl in the lower classes. Of course, charity or State aid will have to furnish the means at first, but the knowledge of such craft is the surest guarantee that less and less demand will be made upon the tax-payers. That is my hobby, and we can discuss it at our leisure, any number of times to come. I think further on than that, however. Instead of planning for enlarged asylums, and looking upon the crop of idiots and insane as God's method to draw out our sympathies, we may as well settle at once that we are responsible for a state which allows the birth of useless and helpless members of society, and that on a day — which let us pray may not be a distant one — we shall know where we have sinned, and find that our criminals have become so through our own stupidity and negligence. The energy, the time and money, spent on mere alleviation belong to something higher. To relieve suffering must remain, in part, our work always; but every soul with any faith in man's destiny must work with even deeper zeal to prevent the existence of suffering. It can be done. It must be done, no matter in what imperfect measures,

by every one of us, but the deepest thought that can be given can barely reach the heart of the perplexed and encumbered topic."

"You make my own conviction clearer," Mrs. Herndon said, after a little silence that settled between them. "The thing nearest my hand is what I shall seek to do, I said yesterday, when I had seen the happiness of those poor souls lifted out of their prison. But there are many questions I want to ask. Life is simply a big interrogation point at present."

"And I shall make now a comprehensive apology for looking at my watch, intended to cover all future transgressions. I must run, but I shall come in with equal informality other times, if you allow it."

"I shall be glad of any bit of time you can give us," Mrs. Herndon said cordially. "Have n't you a moment now for Cousin Marcia? I hear her voice in the parlor, and it is such a pleasure to her to see you."

Miss Erminia looked at him with unusual interest, as he came toward them. People that belonged to the regular school, after all, had their advantages, and were not likely to turn suddenly upon one, as seemed to be the method with electric doctors. If there were only more time, and she could sit down with him quietly, undoubtedly he could throw light on certain obscure points. He never had any time, however, and Miss Erminia sighed deeply, for he had gone with a word only, and left her to the subdued yet indignant state to which Miss Biggs had reduced her.

XIII.

"IT 'S gettin' plainer every minute," Miss Biggs remarked aloud, as she stopped suddenly on the corner of Twenty-third Street. "Now take me wherever you 're a mind to."

She had faced a long-skirted theological student, with white eyelashes and a pasty complexion, who blushed a deep pink as he hesitated a moment. This singular person hardly seemed to require assistance, yet had addressed herself directly to him. He looked inquiringly at her, no appropriate form of words suggesting itself.

"Don't waste a mite o' your precious time on my account," Miss Biggs said affably. "You was in a hurry, an' so 'm I, soon as I find out jest which way I 'm to go."

"Have you wandered out of your way, madam?"

"Know it consid'able better, young man, than, from the looks o' things, I should say you did," Miss Biggs replied, after a look in which she took in every detail of the speaker's personality. "It 's a great pity, long 's you 've made up your mind that you 've got somethin' to say to folks, that you 're a-sailin' jest over their heads instead o' comin' down among 'em an' findin' out how they live. You 're in the wrong kind o' air, young man, if you want to get a long breath, or let anybody else get one; but, there! you 've got to find it out for yourself, an' my tellin' you forty times over won't make you see the way I

do. You'll be a brother o' some sort, most likely, an' walk in a path jest quarter of an inch wide all the days of your life, an' be certain, every one o' them, that you 're on the king's highway. You look well-meanin', an' that 's the reason I wish what you 're goin' to be about had a little more common sense in it."

"She 's an escaped lunatic," the student said, with a look about for some policeman; then hurried on, with an apprehensive glance behind him.

Miss Biggs looked after him a moment, nodded once or twice as if quite satisfied with her diagnosis of the case, and, crossing the Square, passed on slowly up Madison Avenue, pausing to enter a druggist's and study a directory, then walking on, her eyes taking in every feature of the crowded way, and her lips commenting half audibly on any point that impressed her specially.

"What that angel 'll say, the Lord only knows," she said at last, as the number for which she had searched was reached, and she rang the bell. "More 'n likely she 'd do better 'n me; but I 'm sent ahead, an' that 's the end on 't. I want to see Mr. Herbert Longshore," she went on, as the door opened. "I 've got a message for him."

The man looked at her doubtfully.

"They 're dressing for dinner," he said. "Leave your message with me."

"When I get the right kind o' one for you, you 'll get it, young man," Miss Biggs said calmly. "This one don't go to but one person, an' I 'll wait long 's necessary for him to get ready to hear it."

"It 's a woman, sir, that insists on seeing you," the man said, as Mr. Longshore came unexpectedly down the stairs. "She has a message she won't give to anybody else."

"This way."

Mr. Longshore beckoned to Miss Biggs, who followed him into the reception-room, and took the chair he handed her as punctiliously as if it had been Mrs. Herndon herself. She was probably somebody's housekeeper, for there were no symptoms of the agent or the beggar about her, and he seated himself and returned the look of interested examination she had bent upon him. From the rose in his buttonhole to the tips of his natty boots, Mr. Longshore's atmosphere was that of jubilant prosperity, and Miss Biggs drew a long breath as he said, —

"Well, madam, what can I do for you?"

"What you 'll do ain't to be settled with me, nor with anybody but your own self, askin' advice of yourself, an' listenin' harder 'n ever you did in your life to hear what 's said back. You need n't lift your eyebrows as if I did n't know what I was talkin' about, for I do. This ain't a job I hanker after, I can tell you, but it 's laid on me to do, an' I never heard it plainer since I was born: 'Amanda Biggs, you 've got to lay it before him.'"

Mr. Longshore's eyes twinkled. This was not at all in the ordinary line of interview.

"You don't look as if you 'd hurt a fly," Miss Biggs went on, after another examination. "I don't suppose you would hurt a fly, but you 'll pizen young children an' babes at the mother's breast, an' see gals go to ruin, an' men an' women turnin' to sots, an' smile away as easy as you 're a-smilin' now. Mrs. Herndon said you was kind, — the kindest man she 'd ever known, — but that 's what you 've done."

"I!" returned the amazed Mr. Longshore, helplessly. "If you would be kind enough to explain a little, madam, I might see what you are driving at, perhaps. Did Mrs. Herndon send you here?"

"She don't know I 'm here," Miss Biggs said resolutely, "an' she most likely would 'a' told me to keep

away if she had known I was a-coming. But she set me to findin' out what kind o' dens you New York men that roll in riches get their incomes from, an' I 've found out, an' that 's why I 'm here. You 've got a factory an' two houses down on Nineteenth Street. The factory I hain't anything to say about at present, except that there 's dozens of girls in it, workin' ten hours a day, an' gettin' three dollars a week to live on. About how far do you calkilate three dollars a week 'd go if you had it to lay out? That ain't the p'int. The p'int is, that there 's those two houses, right up among your fine folks as it were. Water in the cellars, filth an' mould an' damp on the walls; boards rottin' under the feet that tread 'em; dark rooms that never get air nor a gleam o' sunshine, an' that smell — O Lord, how they smell! An' under each one a grog-shop, where what the mis'able critters make, one way an' another, gets taken in faster 'n it 's made."

"I know nothing of any such place," Mr. Longshore said with some heat. "I never was in it in my life."

"If you had been, I 'll say for you you would n't 'a' left it what it is. But you have n't been. All you do is to squeeze out the rent from a passel of half-starved women that have got to make up some way what your groggery steals from their husbands; squeeze it out, a dime to time if you can't get it any other way, and use it for *this!* Do you dare? It 's your agent, you 'll say; but would your agent set a sick woman out on the sidewalk, an' sell off a dyin' man's bed if he did n't have his orders from you to get the rent anyhow?"

Mrs. Longshore had entered, attracted by the unusual sound, and stood aghast at the indictment rolled out.

"How dare you speak so?" she cried. "Mr.

Longshore has no such agent, and never allowed anything of the sort! Send her away, Bert."

"I wish to hear the whole of it, Sally," Mr. Longshore said firmly. "What agent are you talking about, madam?"

"Terrence Brady. Do you know now? I wish he'd lied to me, an' you were n't the man."

"You don't know anything about him?" said Mrs. Longshore, eagerly, her face falling as she saw her husband's disturbed look.

"Brady? Why, yes, I know Brady," he said hesitatingly. "An unpleasant animal, but a capital collector. Hatch recommended him to me, and he 's always been up to the minute with his collections."

"But, Bert, she has n't told the truth? Your houses are not like that?"

Mr. Longshore looked still more uncomfortable. "My dear child, I own various pieces of property that may change hands to-morrow. That is part of my business. Do you suppose that I can keep the track of each one, beyond its location? I know what she refers to now. There are two houses together, and I took them as an accommodation in the beginning. The location is capital, and I held on to them because of it. The bag-factory entrance is just round the corner, and a good many of the employees live in these houses, and all about there."

"Live?" Miss Biggs said reflectively. "Well, I suppose you have to call it that. But now, here on this paper" — and Miss Biggs waved the yellow envelope which she had again extracted from her pocket — "I made a count this very day in that house that Mrs. Herndon took the Englishman from, — he an' his wife an' five children in a cellar, with standin' water all in the middle of it. Do you know what she did for 'em? She came round to me, white as a ghost with the sights she 'd been seeing, an' Les-

sing he sat there carvin' away, an' his eyes borin' to the bottom o' everything he looked at, an' she says, 'I want to get a floor, a good, comfortable place, now — this very hour, if possible — an' put furniture an' all in it, so that these people can live.' 'There 's a clean place down Eighteenth Street,' Lessing says, 'an' a second-hand shop I shall show you, where much can be bought.' 'The things must be new and clean,' she says; an' with that I says, ''T ain't the first time I 've helped in such a job, an' I can see that everything 's set in place, an' help 'em fix up.' An' with that, without any more words, out we goes, an' I reckon we made things fly. There was n't a thing wantin', from a second-hand fryin'-pan, that 's worth ten new ones any day, up to a high-cheer for the littlest gal. Lessing he took hold and druv nails like all-possessed; and in three hours there was them critters lifted out o' the slough, an' set a-going, an' the man, an' the woman too, jest cryin' an' not able to say a word. Mrs. Herndon, she 'd gone. She did n't stay for no talk, but she called me out, an' her eyes was blazin'. 'Find out about this house,' she said. 'Find out how many people there is in it, an' who owns it, an' all you can, an' then come over an' tell me.'

"I minded. I 've done it. I 've told her, an' now it 's your turn. That house has got one hundred and eighty-two livin' souls in it, an' thirty-two of 'em children, swearin' an' fightin' on the stairs lively 's their fathers. Four families to a floor, that 's what it is; an' six floors, countin' the basement. The top floor is the fullest, for it 's the cheapest; a family in every room, if you 've a mind to call 'em families. Four men an' three women in one, an' that 's four dollars a month toward your spendin'-money. Married? Not much. There 's a widow next 'em, — says she 's a widow, — an' she has seven boarders.

Next to her is a rag-picker an' four boys. Down on the floor below there 's another widow, an' she takes boarders too, — servant-girls lookin' for places, — ten cents a night. They can stay respectable if they fight hard enough, but they don't all fight, you see; an' when they get places, folks wonder where their little innocent children learned so much wickedness. In front of her 's a washerwoman, an' she has three small children, pleasant as young hyenas, an' three men lodges with her, one a boy just turned eighteen. Animals have a stall apiece, an' even a pig a sty; but these holes are dirtier 'n any sty I ever set eyes on. Down below are four families, drunk the most o' the time. An' the sinks, an' the closets, an' every square inch, is alive with stink. I don't mince words. It takes the smell of the whiskey to make you forget other smells. You 've planned it well. The men that go to bed there wake up with a band round their heads as if you 'd screwed on an iron cap. They can't eat, but they can drink; an' there 's a sinkin' an' a cravin' that nothin' on earth but whiskey can stop. An' if he thinks he 'll stop, there 's the smell from the saloon; an' how 's he to stand it, an' say no, when every nerve in him is sick for it? I hain't told you half. The other house is a little more decent. There ain't but one hundred and eighteen in that, an' a good many of 'em your factory girls, — three an' four in a room, clubbed together to save rent an' have a little money left for clothes. You look kind o' sick. You don't like it? Will you go down there, an' look with your own eyes? You ain't willin' such things should go on? You 've got hearts, if you are rich. Go an' see for yourselves, an' then make up your mind what you 'll do. I 've done my part. I m 'nothin' but a voice that 's obleeged to speak when it sees a twist that hands was made to untwist. An' if you don't turn to an'

see about this, there ain't a hell anywheres, true or make-believe, that 's hot enough to frizzle you the way you 'll deserve. I have n't that opinion of either of you; an' I 'll turn to an' do anything you say, if so be you make up your mind what."

Miss Biggs paused. Mrs. Longshore was crying violently, and Mr. Longshore sat motionless, his eyes fixed on the floor. Her own face worked strangely, and she made long passes over herself as she stood there.

"I 'd like a treatment myself, if there was anybody handy to give it," she said. "I have n't been so worked up for a long spell. Good-by, an' I 'll come again any time you say so, if you want more figgers."

There was no response, and Miss Biggs turned away and went softly into the hall. She had not counted on quite so strange an effect, and hesitated a little as she laid her hand on the door-knob.

"I 've done my part, an' don't see as there 's a chance for more now," she said, and marched away.

"Bert, I wish Margaret was here," Mrs. Longshore sobbed presently. "I feel just as I did the night ma died, — just as if it was only the beginning of awfulness. Can't you send for her?"

"Don't, Sally. I don't want to see her till I have looked at this thing with my own eyes. I can't believe it, and I won't, till I have seen it. The woman is one of these social agitators. She 'll say anything to make a point."

Mr. Longshore rose, and walked up and down the room, keen irritation in face and voice.

"What was it Margaret was saying the other day?" Mrs. Longshore said presently. She had wiped her eyes, and shaken herself like a bird after a sudden shower; but her face was as troubled as her husband's. "Somebody had given her a report

about houses — I remember — a Board of Health Report, — and it said there were twenty-five thousand tenement-houses. Bert, do you suppose they are like — ours?"

Mrs. Longshore hesitated. Even to think of such ownership carried contamination.

Mr. Longshore kicked away a footstool.

"Reports are always cooked, child. It's their interest to make out a desperate case. They are usually the work of the strongest will among them, — your man with a hobby, who prances through the pages on it, and revels in imagined horrors. Because these houses happen to be out of repair, and dirty, you arraign me as if I had planned it all deliberately. How am I going to help it?"

"I never thought of such a thing, Bert. I wish that horrid woman had never found her way here!" Mrs. Longshore cried with sudden indignation. "Oh, I know how it will all end! Nobody will be satisfied with our doing things reasonably, and all at once we shall have to sell everything and go shares with everybody!" And once more Mrs. Longshore dissolved in tears. "You're as good as an angel, Bert, now. I won't have you any better."

"I'm afraid you won't," Mr. Longshore said with a groan. "I didn't suppose a thing could upset me so. I shall look with my own eyes, as I told you; and if there is anything I ought to do, I won't back out. But I half believe the woman is a lunatic. Don't spend any more tears, Sally, till we know. Perkins will be out of his mind if we keep dinner waiting any longer."

"I had forgotten there was such a thing as dinner," Mrs. Longshore said. "I don't want any. It seems if I never should want any again."

"Then you won't be in a condition to give me the moral support I've got to have. I have an impression,

Sally, that we are coming to new times, and must dance to a new tune. All the same, we won't be crushed." And Mr. Longshore rubbed his forehead fiercely by way of smoothing out the perplexed frown that had lingered there, and for the rest of the evening showed himself the debonair and hilarious little host he was wont to be to all who came and went under his roof.

Miss Biggs crossed the city till Eighth Avenue was reached, and then, deciding that more walking was out of the question, took a car-fare from the purse that Mrs. Herndon kept supplied for that purpose, and waved her umbrella at the reluctant and indignant driver of a bobtail car, who started on before she had entered the door, and precipitated her into the lap of a fat German woman, who frowned severely as Miss Biggs struggled into a seat at her side and proceeded to give her views of car-drivers in general to a young reporter opposite, who listened with surprised and charmed attention.

"I ain't set on Philadelphia, though bein' born in Jersey always seems to make you kind of kin," she remarked. "I've been there enough to know the ways, but Philadelphia butter's too much for electricity or anythin' else that's kind o' movin' an' upsettin'. I mean by that, you see, that where folks is chock full o' the highest kind o' livin', there ain't much room for the Holy Ghost. If the Quakers had n't held on to the inward voice, and sot still to listen, tarrapin an' br'ilers an' the rest would 'a' smothered it, sure's you're born. What's more, they did, an' that's why there come a split. What I set out to say was that there ain't a car-driver on the meanest line there that would look at you as sassy as drivers on the best line here. I've seen a Walnut Street conductor run across the street for a baby that the mother was liftin' up, an' touch his hat

when she thanked him. They've got manners an' sense, but I ain't found one yet you could say as much for here. They'd as soon shoot you in or out head first as any other way."

Miss Biggs subsided into silence and began to count her money, while the reporter proceeded to make an item of this unexpected view of things.

"There's ten cents short, somehow," Miss Biggs said, half aloud, and counted again. This extra purse, the contents of which Mrs. Herndon supplied, was a source of deep anxiety to the bearer, who accounted painfully for every penny.

"When it's my own business, I expect to pay with my own money; an' when it's yours, I'll pay with yours, an' keep the account square an' reg'lar," Miss Biggs had said resolutely; and, in spite of opposition, the accounts were rendered on corners of newspapers, backs of envelopes, and bits of grocery paper, not only for car-fares, but for small expenditures of all sorts, whether for Meg or one and another in need, her self-appointed stewardship giving her more and more occupation as the days went on. Lessing watched her with increasing curiosity, divided between approbation of her good deeds and amazement at her methods. But anxiety for Meg dominated everything at present. The fever had left her, but the reaction was still upon her; and now that the sharp tension was over, she had sunk into a brooding melancholy that lifted only as Mrs. Herndon came in for the hour she gave her now, and talked of anything that seemed to hold interest. Lessing watched her anxiously. He went out less, and, as he carved, looked up often and sighed as he saw the change. She started at every sound, and shook with sudden terror, and, even when most interested, glanced aside at any unexpected movement, her eyes full of a fear she would not speak.

"She'll go clean out of her head if it goes on," Miss Biggs said. "Somethin' 's got to be done."

"Will you go with her if I send her to the country?" Mrs. Herndon asked.

"I'll go to any spot on the continent that suits you best," Miss Biggs returned. "Did n't I tell you I wanted some one that would set me jobs, an' the harder the better? She ain't *for* me, you might say, nor yet is she ag'in me, an' I 'll be as agreeable as she's equal to, an' get her to take notice if anybody kin. You mean the child an' all? I s'posed you did, an' you'd ought to make him go along too — Mr. Lessing, I mean."

"There is plenty of room," Mrs. Herndon said, abstractedly, wondering if Meg would consent.

"I don't know how she'll get along without him, she's so sort o' used to lookin' to him for everything," Miss Biggs continued, after a pause. "How do you s'pose he knew old iron was better to buy than new — I mean in spiders?"

"Iron spiders! Oh, you mean for Felix!" Mrs. Herndon said, after a moment of amazement.

"I mean for anybody that wants fried anything. It's pans I'm talkin' about — though spiders is the reg'lar name — an' you can't be expected to know an old one fries easier 'n a new one. He knew it, though. He's got as many kinks as a woman; but then I said always, and I say now, any man that's worth his salt is more 'n half woman anyway. He'd ought to have an invalid wife an' not less 'n ten feeble constituted children to bring out his gifts like they might be. Not but what he's got his hands pretty full jest at present, but maybe they ain't any fuller 'n they'd better be. But that brings me to somethin' I've been turnin' over."

The interview thus far had been in the outer shop. Mrs. Herndon had said good-by to Meg, and was on

her way out as Miss Biggs walked in, having come over at once after Dr. Strothers had left her. It was the day after the interview with Mr. Longshore, of which Miss Biggs had resolved to say nothing at present, as in the mean time something had happened that might have a bearing on action for Meg. She had not spoken of it, but now she said, —

"There 's mischief in the air, an' I 've begun to think the sooner we get Meg off the more chance there 'll be of her keepin' her senses. I hain't told her, an' I hain't told him, but, fur 's I can make out, him that she calls Gid was round here when I came in yesterday. An' it 's through Felix. I see Felix comin' down Ninth Avenue on a tight run, an' a boy after him, that pretty nearly grabbed him, till jest as I stepped out from the door an' faced him. 'What do you want?' I says, an' Felix he cut in to his mother. 'Does that boy belong here?' he says, trying to peep in. 'You go about your business lively,' says I, an' he cut off ag'in after a minute. I stood still. Somehow I suspicioned things were n't right; for, you see, Felix don't never get into fights an' sich, like boys with a tongue, an' while I was sort of wondering, along comes a man — the meechin'est critter for a well-dressed one I 've seen in many a day, an' he asked the very questions the boy 'd done.

"'That boy that run in here, — does he belong here?' says he.

"'He 's goin' home with me in about two minutes,' says I, for somehow it flashed over me what he might be up to. Lessing was in there, an' I jest led Felix off an' took him up to my room, an' the man waitin' opposite, an' there I kep' him till dark, makin' zephyr roses, that I will say he makes as nat'rel as I can. We 'd better get her away; an' my notion is, you have her go home with the two old ladies, an' put her in charge o' that one that ain't sure what

she'd better do with herself. I've got another notion for your own house. Deepmouth is farther away, an' I want this thing settled before ever she comes back again."

"How do you mean?"

"Amongst you all, there ain't anybody seems to have found out whether she was or was n't married to that hound. Jerry said not, but who 's seen Jerry an' asked how he knows? If she was, the law gives him the boy, an' all at once he 'll be off with him an' have him hidden away just to torment her. It 's borne in on me that that 's what 's comin', an' why she 's so skeery. The Lord grant she ain't! Mothers outside the law git more rights than them that 's inside. There! What did I tell you? That 's him, this blessed minute, on the other side o' the way. Don't seem to notice, but get a look if you kin."

The man sauntered by slowly, nodded insolently as Miss Biggs looked over to him, and turned into a saloon just above.

"Don't leave Meg alone a moment till Lessing comes," Mrs. Herndon said hurriedly. "After dark I will send over a carriage, and she must come with Felix and stay with me till Cousin Marcia goes. Whether the man can do anything or not, she will be as frightened as if he could, if she knows he has been in the neighborhood. Tell Lessing quietly, as soon as he comes in, and I will come over myself about eight."

"It 's all comin' out the way it had ought to," Miss Biggs said approvingly. "Trust me for keepin' things straight. You ain't a mite nervous, be ye? I 'll lock her in, an' go to the car with you if you be."

"Stay with her," Mrs. Herndon said. "It is broad daylight still, and there is a policeman in sight." And she hurried toward him without venturing to look back. Her heart was beating fast. In all her wan-

derings in strange ways she had had no such sudden terror before. Her hands were shaking even when her own door had closed behind her; and as she went into Miss Marcia's room, in spite of her effort to keep it steady, her voice trembled.

"I want a great favor of you, Cousin Marcia. I wonder if you will be willing."

Miss Erminia, who had been sitting pensively in the corner, still inclined to brood over the unpleasant nature of her yesterday's interview, looked up eagerly.

"Anything that is possible, child, even to the half of my kingdom," Miss Marcia said, with her brightest smile.

"That is just it. Half the kingdom is the only thing that will do. I want you to turn Deepmouth into an asylum."

Miss Marcia flushed as the story went on, and Miss Erminia forgot herself and Miss Biggs, and everything but sympathy.

"We were going day after to-morrow," she said. "Let it be to-morrow, Marcia, and then we shall feel that the poor thing is out of danger. I shall take care of the little boy myself, and see that he never disturbs you. Margaret, you are coming there for July, anyway. Let the Foxgrove house stay shut up, and you stay with us. Then we shall all know everything as fast as it happens, and I need n't worry over your going round alone, and this wretch following you with daggers and bludgeons and things."

"He will not know my part in it," Margaret said, laughing, but with a little shudder. Something baleful seemed to come with the mere thought of the man.

"You shall not go over there alone this evening," Miss Erminia continued anxiously. "I wish Paul Strothers was here this minute."

They had gone down to the library, and as she spoke Simmons threw open the door.

"It's the doctor, in a dreadful hurry, an' can he see you a moment?"

"Oh, I am so glad to see you," Mrs. Herndon said, as he entered, his hands full of jonquils, which he put into hers as she spoke.

"See, they are from an old Dutch manor-house on the Clove road — out on Long Island, you know. Something has gone wrong," he added, his tone changing; "what is it?"

He listened gravely as Mrs. Herndon repeated the story.

"That is the wisest plan for all concerned," he said, when she had ended. "I will go over myself. She trusts me, next to you and Lessing, and will consent to whatever we think best. And when she is safely housed, I will do what ought to have been done before, and find out whatever there is that can be known of the whole miserable business. She shall be protected in any case."

Miss Erminia looked after him with profound admiration as he hurried away.

"There are some most excellent features in the regular school," she said. "One has to investigate others, of course, to find where their disadvantages lie, but I am more and more convinced that a general knowledge is essential to a properly grounded opinion on what may be held to. I see the Southernwood in him plainer and plainer."

"And I see the good man, with faith enough left to put out his hand whenever anybody needs helping up," Miss Marcia said energetically. "He makes me ashamed of my own lukewarmness, and the way I have let this winter slip away, uselessly to everybody. I have n't even done you any good, Margaret. Why did n't you set me to work?"

"Because you have always been at work for other people, and it has been the best possible thing for you to do exactly what you have. Think of the comfort, too, for me in having you here."

Miss Marcia brightened. In spite of the ease that life had held, she had aged perceptibly this winter; and as she looked up apprehensively, now and then, at sudden sounds in the street, Margaret watched her face, and sighed a little as she remembered her years, and how few there were that meant any part of the old days dearer to her than any. Miss Erminia rambled on through dinner and the hour that followed, and gave a little shriek of delighted expectation and interest as the bell rang at last, and she heard Dr. Strothers's voice in the hall. Felix had his hand, and clung close to him as he came in; and behind followed Lessing, Meg leaning on his arm and quivering with excitement and weakness.

"The first station on the Underground Road," Dr. Strothers said. "The abducted must be put to bed at once, and Felix had better be with her for to-night."

Mrs. Herndon took Meg's hand quietly, when Lessing had led her up the stairs, and left her in the little room that opened from her own.

"It is good in you to come," she said, "and this is a safe place for everybody. You will be taken care of, dear Meg, till you are strong and well and all yourself again."

"You were born to do every one good, and I was born to do every one harm," Meg said passionately. "If I died there would never be any more trouble, for then Gid could never find out anything about Felix."

"He will never find out now," Mrs. Herndon said; "and if he does, Meg, he can do you no harm. We shall all see to that. Can't you trust us?"

"I don't mean to make so much trouble," Meg said humbly. "I shall be different, perhaps, pretty soon. I don't want to spoil everything, but I can't stop thinking. If I could only work, it would n't be so bad; but Dr. Strothers told me I must keep still till I was stronger."

"Poor Meg!" Mrs. Herndon said. "You are just finding out that it is much harder to wait than to work. Call the waiting a task, too, and perhaps it will be easier. It will make you stronger, Meg, if you do it bravely; and we all have to do it, sooner or later."

Meg looked up suddenly. What could Mrs. Herndon know about hard things, except as somehow she seemed to understand everything? There was a look in her eyes now that meant something more than pity, — a look that for an instant opened up some depth that Meg vaguely felt rather than saw. She had been thinking only of herself. Could it be that the helper needed help? She had been selfish and bad. Now she would try once more to keep quiet, and believe what she was told, and make no more trouble. She caught Margaret's hand and kissed it passionately, as she lay down at last, and, though she started and cried out often as the night went on, grew calmer with every hour.

At nine the next morning came Lessing, followed shortly by Miss Biggs, whose face wore an expression of calm triumph as the train at last moved from the depot, and Mrs. Herndon turned away with a sigh of relief.

"That job 's well done," said Miss Biggs, "an' now there 's another one jest opened up, that I 'm ready to turn out, soon 's we 've come to a place where you can hear yourself think. He 's in it, too," she added, pointing to Lessing, who had hurried away. "He 's in it, an' we 're all in it, an' things is so tangled an' twisted it 's a certain sign that the time 's nigh for

untwistin'. I ain't a-going to specify a word more, till you're home, an' got rested a spell." And Miss Biggs compressed her lips firmly, and closed her eyes till the Square was reached again, and she nodded amiably to Simmons as the door opened.

"You 'll hev to come to it," she said. "I ain't your enemy, nor the enemy of any livin' thing but dirt an' cussedness; an' I 'm here on a mission that you 'd ought to jine in with, an' not be objectin' an' wishin' you could keep me out. You can't keep out what the Lord sends, an', sure 's you 're born, I 'm in that kind o' business. Join hands, come now, an' help along."

"She 's out of her head," Simmons remarked later, as he descended to the kitchen. "She 's got the power on her, an' long 's the missus can stan' it, I 'll hev to; but would n't Mr. Herndon open his eyes if he see her? Not but what it 's right and proper. That blessed angel don't know no other way, but I' m goin' to have my eyes on her more 'n ever; an' if things is n't jes' as they 'd oughter be, I 'll know de occasion why." And Simmons returned to his post, shaking his head as he reflected on the nature of the "power" that had evidently settled permanently upon Miss Biggs, and that would probably work its will in unexpected ways on all connected with her.

XIV.

IT was seldom that Gid wandered out of the Fourth Ward, where, after many ups and downs, a successful stroke in gambling had made him master of funds enough to buy out Barney Sullivan, at present Alderman, and giving the light of his countenance at the City Hall to the Board of his brethren, recruited from like sources. Naturally, Barney felt that city government demanded the concentration of all his powers, and for the time joyfully resigned his regular occupation as a champion mixer of fancy drinks. In fact, he had felt his powers wasted on Cherry Street, where the demand was chiefly for whiskey straight, and fine points were unappreciated. The slight unpleasantness between himself and Gid had long ago been set aside as not worthy of mention between friends; and as Gid had developed unexpected capacity as a ward politician, Barney regarded him as an able and even perhaps dangerous rival, who must have things made easy for him. The saloon was a showy one, the centre rallying-point for the great tenement-house to which the 'longshoremen came home at night; and Gid's income had never been on so secure a basis. He was in the flush of early ownership when he had come upon Meg, and suddenly determined that she should share his good luck and perhaps push his fortunes. His plan had failed. He had been one fool and she another, and yet he brooded over his wrongs in a way strange to himself.

"The devil's in it," he muttered at times. "It 's possession, that's what it is. Sandro 's right. Women

have the evil eye born in 'em, and she 's got it, an' cast it on me. It 's lucky I did n't kill her, but I 'm bound to be even with her yet. Where the devil did she go, anyhow ? "

Evidently McAuley was the one to ask ; but for reasons of his own he preferred not to face McAuley, who a few evenings before had suddenly, after long submission to the interruption and insult of a bully, taken him by neck and waistband, and dropped him in the street, as one might drop an overloud and intrusive puppy. Such fate for himself would have a bad effect on the business. But perhaps the question might be answered otherwise. He bribed a small girl to go, ostensibly on behalf of Mrs. Watts, and ask for Meg's number; but Jerry detected the fraud on the spot, and returned word that when Gid was ready to ask his own questions he would find an answer waiting for him. Gid ground his teeth as he thought it over. The brute instinct of domination grew stronger and stronger. Meg ought to be conquered. What was she, to set herself up against a man with respectable relations, and plenty of money in his pocket ? He would find her if it took half of it; and if she had gone to this Felix that she had cried for, he 'd see to that too. The law had n't a word to say to the man that killed his wife if he found her under sufficiently aggravating circumstances, and he 'd fix it so that if he did make up his mind to end it this way, he would get glory out of it rather than dishonor. He had haunted criminal courts. There was fascination in the thought of a personal trial and a triumphant acquittal. He would be in the papers. It might even be a good card for him politically. The hate that had smouldered now burned with a rising flame. He must find her ; and he chose to do it himself, if possible. He had ceased to ask why he should take the trouble, and what dif-

ference it could make to him where Meg had gone or what she did, but brooded over the matter with deepening indignation as days went on, till one afternoon, with a vague feeling that Madison Square had helped him to his first knowledge and might to a second, he went up and seated himself on the same bench where he had talked with Meg in April. Folly, of course. If she should come again, how could he manage to make her either go with him, or, failing this, tell where she lived and with whom?

He sat there sullenly, with small sense of the sunshine, or the soft wind that blew through the old trees and ruffled the feathers of busy sparrows; and as he sat, Felix came swiftly down the Park, his brilliant eyes taking in every detail. He had never forgotten the pale face, the light furtive eyes, and the sneering smile of the man who had held his mother's arm that day which meant his first experience of terror and dismay. Gid had barely noticed him, nor would he have been likely to do so now, had not Felix suddenly stopped short, trembling with fury, yet helpless to do anything but fix his eyes, fiery with hatred, on the evil face he wanted to tear and destroy. It was but an instant, yet Gid had seen the look and sprang to his feet.

"By G—! it 's the very brat! Here, you! What 's your name?"

Felix had darted off as Gid rose, and was making his way under horses' heads across the crowded Square. Gid dashed after him, followed by various boys who hailed the probable thrashing at the end as an agreeable variation of the general monotony. To Seventh Avenue it was a question which should win. Then Gid, whose wind was short, and who had not run since his newsboy days, fell back, panting.

"Ten cents to whoever catches him," he said; and a dozen boys of all sizes flew down the street, all but

one stopped short by an unusually energetic policeman. Gid followed slowly, watching for the return of some one of his deputies, somewhat surprised, as he went on, that none appeared. He had crossed Ninth Avenue, puzzled a little, and wondering if, after all, he had made a fool of himself, before he heard a voice hailing him, —

"I say, mister! He 's down there. I just missed him; but I 'll tell you where he went if you 'll hand over the ten cents."

"I'll hand when I know," Gid returned, following the boy till Lessing's shop was reached.

"That 's where he cut in, just as I 'd pretty nearly grabbed him," the boy said, panting, to indicate the strenuous nature of his pursuit. "Where 's your ten cents?"

Gid eyed the boy. It would be agreeable to tell him it would keep till some other time; but that would mean a row, and he did not wish to attract attention. He selected a battered one, with a hole in it, however, which the boy took grumblingly, hovering about till warned off by an oath. Evidently there had been a mistake somewhere, Gid thought. The child was too well dressed to belong here; but no harm could come from questioning the woman who stood in the door, and who might perhaps be a nurse, or somebody in charge of him. Rebuffed here, he watched her presently lead the child away, and then, swearing at his own folly, went into a saloon just above, and, as he drank his glass of brandy and water, asked the barkeeper casually what sort of a shop that was in the old wooden house.

"He 's a crazy German," the barkeeper said indifferently. "Does some work or other with wood — makes furniture, most likely — an' has a gang of Socialists there every week."

Gid's experience had not lain in this direction.

Sluggers were much more in his line, and he was not sure but that Socialists meant some new sort of Methodists.

"Married?" he said presently.

The barkeeper opened his eyes. The tone was significant. Perhaps something was up. He knew the neighborhood talk, and hesitated a moment.

"I don't know as that's anybody's business," he said at last. "There's a woman there, an' she ain't the kind you'd look to find there. He's a reg'lar German, blue eyes an' all that; an' she's a reg'lar Spaniard, you might say. I was brought up in the ward here; was n't more 'n ten years old when he came, him an' the man over him, an' it was a good three years before she came, with a baby. She's as silent as he is, an' awful uppish. There ain't anybody round that can speak to Meg, an' it's more what she looks than what she says. She don't say nothin'."

Gid's hands were trembling, and he set down the glass suddenly.

"There's a set o' watch-dogs round here, so 't you can't ever go near her," the barkeeper continued confidentially. Now that he had begun, he felt inclined to go on. "I don't mind sayin' there's more 'n one of us has tried, but she never shams. She went off on a visit awhile ago; but she's back, an' sick. Somehow or other, we all seem to keep track of her, an' sort o' like to know she's round, whether you can get a word out of her or not. Here's a man that swears by her. Holloa, Tim! You're early. What's up?"

"Been turned off," the man said surlily. "Too much jaw, that d——d Smith said, an' I'd better try it somewhere else. I'd like him to try it on a dollar a day, an' a sick wife an' four growing children, d—n him!"

"How long ago did she come here?" Gid asked.

"She? Oh, Meg!" the bartender returned as he drew a glass of beer for the newcomer. "Eight years, about. The boy's eight, they say. He keeps as close as the rest, an' you don't catch him out except as he goes an' comes from school. You kin to her any way?"

"Yes, I'm kin," Gid said. His lips were dry, and his mouth felt parched.

"Fill up," he said, pointing to the brandy, and drank it eagerly; stood there silent for a few moments, then paid for the liquor and went out. It was all plain enough now, and he wondered how he could have forgotten. He would not go in as he had at first planned to do. They were here under his hand, this child that was surely his own, and through whom the mother could best be punished. There was no haste. He would take his time. It was all going to be easy. He would find out from Sims, a Tombs lawyer and dweller in the Fourth Ward, just what his rights were over her and over the boy. He swore a little as he sauntered away, and then chuckled as he thought how Meg would look when he walked in and told her she might choose, — come with him and the boy, and behave herself, or leave the boy to his natural protector. His mood had changed. He had no further desire to kill her. It would be much more interesting to work on her through the boy; and again Gid swore as he recalled the look in those eyes so like Meg's. He'd bring him down. He'd give him something to howl about; and, well content, he hurried on to his own place.

A day or two later, Lessing sat quietly at his work. The door was open into the little bedroom, so long the stronghold for mother and child; but the room was empty, and all traces of Meg's occupation had been removed. The shop door opened quickly, and Lessing bent forward and then nodded slightly to

himself as he resumed his work. Evidently this was the expected visitor. The man came forward, with a gesture to some one behind.

"I 've come for my wife and child," he said. "I 've been kept out of my rights long enough."

"*Was fehlt ihnen?*" Lessing said inquiringly.

"None o' your d——d Dutch lingo!" Gid returned. "You know English well 's I do. Where 's my wife? Out o' the way, now, or I 'll knock you higher 'n a kite!"

Lessing had risen, and stood now between him and the bedroom door. For a moment he feigned resistance; then he gave way suddenly, and Gid, with a bound, was in the inner room, and, after a look that told him it was empty, tearing away bedclothes, lifting the curtain, and at last flinging open the door of the little closet, from which stepped Miss Biggs, calm and undismayed, bearing a broom, as significant of her intentions.

"I sort o' sensed that you 'd be up this arternoon," she said, "an' was n't willin' your feelin's should be hurt with findin' nothin'. Now that you 've done about as you please, maybe you 'll walk out of a lady's room that you was n't asked into in the first place. Yah! Take your sneakin', God-forsaken face out o' my sight, or I shall do something I had n't ought to!" Miss Biggs pursued with sudden fury. "I know you, Gideon Lee; born to cussedness, an' livin' up to your privileges every minute o' the day. I know you! There 's a mark on you Amanda Biggs can tell every time! It 's the mark o' the beast, whose very own you are, an' that makes you come ravenin' an' roarin' like the wild animile you 've been all your days, after the lambs that 's beyond your clutches. Growl an' snarl an' cuss all you like. They 're gone, an' your chance is over."

"You d——d wildcat!" Gid cried, shaking with

fury, "it'll be the worse for you if you've spirited them away, you an' your pimp here!"

Miss Biggs lifted the broom; and as the words left his mouth, it descended in a shower of blows. For an instant he resisted, then turned and fled, Miss Biggs pursuing him to the shop door, and giving her weapon a final wave as Gid turned, and, livid with fury, shook his fist at her.

"That's a good job, well done; a regular clean sweep, if ever there was one," she remarked, as she placed the broom in its corner, and wiped her streaming face. "'T ain't often I go in for blows for anybody, but there 's some men that 's only to be dealt with that way, an' wife-whippers is just the identical ones."

"But, best Amanda," choked Lessing, who had laughed till tears streamed down his face, — "best Amanda, he will have a revenge. Now I shall think always when you go, that from somewhere he will jump for harm."

"I 'll resk it," Miss Biggs said. "I hain't seen the man yit that could scare me out an' out, though I 'm free to confess he 's about the wust kind goin'. To see him slink along the other side o' the way, him and that critter he had along with him! I slid down jest in time to make it kind o' lively for him when he got inside. I had n't calkilated on usin' that broom, but it come to me it might be handy; so I grabbed it when I went into the closet, an', I tell you, it never did a better job."

Lessing still shouted with laughter, — a sound so unaccustomed that Heilbrun suddenly descended the stairs and appeared in their midst, his pipe in one hand and a sheet of manuscript in the other, and his deep-set eyes glaring at Miss Biggs, who confronted him without change of countenance.

"Jine in!" she said, "jine in! I don't know a better way to get rid o' biliousness than a first-class

laugh, an' I never see anybody that needed treatin' for biliousness more than you, an' some o' the pack that trains with you. If you 'd take to livin' a little like he does," and she pointed to Lessing, who was still struggling for composure, "an' not take it all out in figurin', an' straightenin' the world on paper, you 'd get to feel like havin' a laugh now an' then, too. You won't, though, an' 't ain't wuth while to waste breath on you." And, with a nod of mingled defiance and commiseration, Miss Biggs brushed by him and was gone.

"I think it the devil himself who sent her here," Heilbrun said grimly. "There is no more peace, and you, Berthold, are out of your mind all at once. What senseless cackling is this from a man who left folly behind him, it is many years ago?"

Lessing flushed slightly as he took up his work.

"It is a judgment you, that love well the child, would have seen gladly," he said. "Why you will so scoff at this wise Amanda, I know not. Truly she has ways all her own, but never one of them that does not bring a good with it. I have never so laughed, it is sure — no, not since the day that Herr Doctor Schmidt's wig fell into the well, and never have I as good reason. Stay now, and I will tell."

Heilbrun paused reluctantly; but his lips twitched as he listened, and he returned to his work without further comment as the story ended. Lessing shook his head when again alone.

"She has right, it may be," he said; "and that she thinks it right, will keep her from fear; but there is danger, and now one must watch. Ach, Gott! Has it begun?"

He started violently as a boy burst into the shop, calling, —

"Come quick! Tim said I was to get you, an' nobody else."

Lessing caught his cap from the nail, locked the shop-door, and followed the boy, who ran down Nineteenth Street, stopping before the first saloon he came to, and waiting for Lessing, who followed him in and stood in consternation at the sight before him. The room was half filled with men who had been drinking or had run in, attracted by the sound of a fight, and between two of whom Tim Rooney, the discharged workman, stood, struggling to free himself, and pouring out curses on his detainers. On the floor, his head supported by a coat that some one had rolled up and pushed under it, lay a figure covered with dirt, and bleeding profusely from a cut in the forehead, and over it bent the barkeeper, sponging the face, and ordering back those that came too near. A gentleman, Lessing saw instantly, with a wonder as to what had brought him there, and still more wonder as the eyes opened, and, after an ineffectual attempt to rise, the voice said feebly, —

"Call a carriage and have me taken home."

"Be easy, an' have a doctor first," the barkeeper said. "He 'll say if ye can go. There 's one coming this minute, an' a policeman too, to be off with the murtherin' villain that went for you."

"I refuse to make complaint. Let the man go," said the victim, firmly; and as he spoke the crowd separated, and Dr. Strothers came swiftly to him.

"You!" he said, for a moment lost in amazement; then, recovering himself, "Never mind explanations. I 'll just see if any bones are broken, and then take you home myself. You here, Lessing? It seems to be a family party. I 'll bandage the cut. That appears to be the only serious difficulty," he added, after a hasty examination, which Tim, a little shamefaced now, eyed with interest. "And a little plaster will make that right."

He busied himself for a moment or two, till the

ugly cut had been brought together; then took the patient's hand.

"Can you walk? That's right. Now, lean on me till you are safely out. Your hat? Never mind. Go on, Matthew; I will drive myself, and you may take a car up, and meet me at Madison Avenue."

The amazed driver helped the patient into the buggy, and walked down to a cross-town car, still shaking his head, as he boarded it, over the mysterious ways of gentlemen in high life. He had lingered for a moment, hoping for an opportunity to enter the saloon and hear full particulars; but obeyed the imperative wave of the hand given by Dr. Strothers, as he divined his intention. Tim shrank away, surprised at his escape, and preferring, now that danger was over, not to meet the accusing eyes of the friend upon whom he had relied as defender; and Lessing, too, had turned.

"It's a queer go; about the queerest I've seen in one while," the barkeeper said, the only American in a crowd of Irish, who had filled the room entirely, and who evidently anticipated a treat from some of the parties concerned. "I seen the gentleman about two o'clock comin' out of the house next the factory. He came into this one, an' went upstairs; an' I says to myself it's a boss contractor, an' somethin' 's up. All to onct there was a scrimmage overhead. I didn't think nothin' of it at first, because there's always somethin' goin' on; but here came a smash an' then a roll, an' when I run out, he an' Tim had come down the stair together, an' I thought first he'd killed the little gentleman. We picked him up an' brought him in here, an' Tim fightin' to get at him ag'in, an' I don't know this minute what it's all about no more 'n you do."

"Served him right," a voice said from the rear.

"Spyin' round, an' smellin', an' writin' down what he seen in a note-book. Served him right."

"Shure, an' it 's twict this week the thing 's been done, an' the man — bad 'cess to him — a-followin' close on the woman, that wint in bold as you plaze, an' niver an excuse nor a word," another voice said; and Lessing, on whom light was beginning to dawn, hastened back to his shop.

"So!" he said to himself. "It is good. Always more and more threads in the web, and the weaving so strong, and the hands more and more. Now let us see the shuttle fly. For not one of us shall it be idle more."

"Drive to your own place, Strothers, if you don't mind," his patient said presently, as they turned into Madison Avenue. "I don't want to go home in just this state. My wife would go into hysterics if she saw me."

He had been leaning back, pale, and still a little faint; but the fresh air had revived him, and he sat up, and looked with deep disgust at his own torn and atrociously dirty garments.

"It will ruin the carriage," he murmured, sinking back.

"Never mind the carriage," Dr. Strothers said. "There 's a lap-robe between you and it. A little water will help things, and you shall have it in a moment. It 's rather hard lines for you, with your unaccustomed nose; but I am seasoned, you know."

He had stopped, as he spoke, before a quiet house on West Seventeenth Street, and ran up the steps to open the door for his patient, who was by him before assistance could be offered.

"I 'm all right," he said. "Now, Strothers, water and brushes and musk, or anything that will drown this awfulness till I can get home and burn the clothes."

"Bay-rum is the nearest approach to it that I own," Dr. Strothers said, opening the door into a bath-room, and then, as it closed behind the disgusted patient, sinking down in a fit of silent laughter.

"That this should have happened to him, of all men in the world!" he said at last. "It's serious business, too. He's evidently got a story to tell. Don't waste strength in scrubbing!" he called through the door. "You will have time enough in the two or three days you will have to be quiet."

There was no answer; but the door opened presently, and Mr. Longshore walked out much cleaner than when he went in, but paler even than before.

"I seem to be pretty well shaken up," he said, with an attempt at a smile. "The fact is, Strothers —" He choked, threw himself in a chair, and, putting his head on the table, for a few minutes cried like a boy.

"You're a doctor, — you won't mind, Strothers; you're used to seeing people make fools of themselves," he said, after a little.

Dr. Strothers had been looking at him anxiously, and took the outstretched hand as he spoke.

"Don't mind at all, Longshore. You've had a serious shock."

"'Tisn't that. I'm over that this minute. It's thinking what a brute beast I've been. Strothers, I don't know how to go home to my wife and tell her it's all true, and more. I don't mind this at all," touching the cut. "On the whole, I think it serves me right, you know."

The aggressive and jubilant prosperity, the only aspect under which Dr. Strothers had known him, was gone. The face that turned toward him now was a troubled, boyish one, seeking help, needing confession, sympathy, understanding, and such absolution as larger thought may bear with it. Dr.

Strothers was silent, but his eyes promised all that the moment demanded.

"You won't mind, Strothers, if I tumble it all out?" Mr. Longshore said anxiously. "I'd rather see how it seems to you before I undertake to tell Sally. I thought at first I would not let her know how any of this happened, but she may as well. It's all part and parcel of the same thing. Till yesterday, — and I suppose it will seem impossible to you, — I did n't even know the real nature of this property. It was all in the hands of an agent, and I asked no questions. Then that firebrand of a woman that Margaret Herndon seems to have in charge appeared to me, like a female John the Baptist, and denounced me and my doings till everything was blue. I considered her a lunatic when she began, but changed my mind before she got through. I was bound to see how much was true, and I have seen. Good God! I supposed such dens might still be in the Old World. I did n't know I was running two of them myself in the New."

He struck his hands together as he spoke, and looked away.

"It was all true," he went on, his eyes turning again to Dr. Strothers's serious face. "I've been in every room in both houses. How to do it, I did n't know. At last I thought I would just tell the truth. 'I am the owner, and I have come down to see what the state of things is,' I said to one and another. Some let me in without a word, some jeered; the most of them swore and threatened to turn me out. I had to go out in the halls often to breathe and get over the deathly sickness. You know what it smells like, Strothers."

Dr. Strothers nodded.

"By the time I got to the second house I was hardly able to step. I leaned against the wall, and

wondered if I should ever get through it. It was the same story, pretty nearly. Ragpickers on the top floor, — a grade higher as you went down. On the third floor, in a dark room, something lay on the bed moaning and crying, and at the door on the floor was a man, his face turned to the wall. A woman had followed me down. 'Get up, Sandy,' she said. 'This gentleman says he 's the owner, an' he 's goin' to alter things a bit.' The man got up slowly and faced me ; a sober, decent-looking man, his face white and set as a dead man's. 'There 's one thing that you nor no man can alter.' His voice goes through me this minute, Strothers. 'There lies my girl, that run in here last night a week, cryin' because some one had followed her, and she was frightened like. A bit wild she was, but bringing me her wages of a Saturday, and wanting always to earn. The woman she ran to was in the same room with her in the factory. They 'd beer on the table, an' company sittin' round. How was she to know the kind it was ? She drank with them, and that was the end of her. And when I 've found her she won't come home. She 's on the road to the devil, she says, and there 's no help for her. She won't go alone. Before the God that made us both, you that let a hole like this stand for men and women to make beasts of themselves in, you 'll be the one to answer when her name 's called, — not she. Alter what you like ; you won't alter that.'

"I suppose you 'd have known what to say, Strothers ; I did n't. There was misery enough in that man's face to damn anybody that had brought it there, I don't doubt. I slunk away. I felt like a hound. Money would n't help, and money was all I had to offer. I went down to the next floor, and stood there looking round the sink-room ; you know what they are, slimy with every sort of filth, and a

heavy, horrible smell that made me deathly sick. I had lost my head a little, I think. I saw this man coming toward me, and two or three behind him, — the one they called Tim. 'Shure, one should do the honors,' he said, 'in what's the same as his own house. I'm beholden to ye for many things, an' it'll be a pleasure to give ye a taste of what ye furnishes free gratis for nothing to us.' I did n't take in what he meant, till he caught me and had me half in the sink. Then I grappled with him. He was drunk and reckless, and the last I know we were rolling over and over down the stair, and the men shouting above. That's a nice day's work, Strothers; a nice tale to take home to poor Sally."

"I'm sorry enough, Longshore, that you 've had to get your experience in such a rough way," Dr. Strothers said earnestly. "You must n't be too hard on yourself. You did n't know, and therefore were not fully responsible."

"I ought to have known. I had no right not to know."

"That is true in part; but the time was not ripe. You do know now, and you will see that your money does its work. If capital means anything, it means protection for the weak. The interest you are to pay for its possession is decent homes, decent wages, some outlook in life for those whose hands have worked out the thought or the will of your brain. I won't preach. Your eyes have seen better sermons than any tongue will ever utter. You are a good man, who has never thought. Come home now. Get over this shock, and find out then what must be done; and I'll help you with all my heart, wherever help is possible."

"I don't feel fit to touch a decent man's hand," poor Longshore said, with a groan, as he rose and faced Dr. Strothers. "There 's something comfortable

about you, Strothers. You make a fellow feel like turning to and seeing if he can make up for lost time. But, really, you know, you ought to kick me down your steps. I feel as if I deserved hanging."

"We'll put off the ceremony for a day or two," Dr. Strothers answered lightly. "Now you must go home, and I want your word that you will not go out till I have seen you to-morrow. You are considerably more used up than you know at present. Do you promise?"

"Ye-es," Mr. Longshore said reluctantly, as he was led down the steps and placed again in the buggy. He was silent through the drive up the Avenue, and looked relieved as the servant told him that Mrs. Longshore was out, and not to be in till dinner-time.

"Go to bed," Dr. Strothers said imperatively; and his patient obeyed languidly, his bruises beginning to make themselves evident.

"Don't brood. We'll talk it all over in a day or two," Strothers said at last, patting him very much as he would have patted Felix, and then hurrying away to make up for lost time, while the unhappy little man turned his face to the wall and gave himself up to miserable meditation, broken at last by the sound of flying steps and Mrs. Longshore's distracted entrance.

"Oh, Bert, Bert! What is it? You poor darling! Tell me the whole this minute. I knew you'd be killed. What is it? Oh, how you look! Tell me this minute."

There was healing in the very look of her indignant, pitying eyes, — in every touch of the soft little hands that had forgotten all tricks of gesture, and patted his cheek as if he had been a baby. Here was some one who insisted upon considering him an angel, and who regarded his own view of his moral

state as an outrage, incredible and not to be listened to for a moment.

"You've married a rascal, Sally," he said again, and then fell asleep, watched adoringly by his wife, who had alternately wept and raged, and who sat there at last, pondering his story and longing to put back everything into the old grooves.

"It seems as if a trumpet had blown," she said at last, half aloud, "and everything was upset all at once, and horrid things crawling out of holes they ought to stay in. There 'll never be any more comfort for anybody, and I wish Miss Biggs was drowned." And Mrs. Longshore cried softly as she sat there, with small thought that the first gleam of the true light had come to their darkness, and that comfort in largest measure was on the way.

XV.

"IT is young men like you that stand in the way, — dreamers, not doers; men that say 'my brother' to all alike, and have neither righteous indignation for thieving capitalists nor any power to make the poor man know his wrongs. You want no violence, no bloodshed, you say. Bah! A wiser than you has said, 'Will not one French Revolution suffice, or must there be two? There will be two, if needed; there will be twenty, if needed; there will be just as many as are needed!'"

Dr. Strothers fixed his eyes on Lessing, against whom the battery was directed, and at whom the speaker shook a fierce but quite impersonal fist. Lessing had wandered out, that afternoon, a little aimlessly, too languid with the sudden heat to visit his usual haunts, and had been spied by Dr. Strothers on his way home from a patient. Lessing interested him more and more; and now he took his arm and sauntered on, smiling to himself as Jared Slocum, rushing across Union Square, saw them and made toward them. The argument began instantaneously, and went on without intermission as they reached Dr. Strothers's house and entered his private office. Slocum shook his head impatiently as, one after another, Lessing's answers to the questions concerning his purposes and hopes came slowly, and broke out at last in scornful denunciation.

"The time is nearer than you think," he went on, after a pause in which his sombre eyes seemed to

send out sparks. "Turn back your page of the past. Remember 1689, remember again 1789; and then count the forces at work, and see what chaos breaks loose at last in this most civilized year of our Lord to come, — 1889. Ten years ahead, and you smile at the prophecy. I tell you, desolation waits for this cursed city sunk in sin and misery. Every crisis brings it nearer. And you prattle about the rights of the individual, knowing well that there is no lie like the lie that each was born into the world for himself. Self is a devil. You are alive only to crush it and live for humanity. But you reject your opportunity, — you who call yourself Socialist, and dishonor the name you would bear."

"I say only that you shall not destroy till you have power to make better building in place of the old," Lessing said slowly. "I say that he who is true Socialist will reach the rich also, and so speak that they will listen and yield — not so, as you would have them, to brute force that wrenches their own from them, and tosses it to hungry wolves, but of their free will. I say he is true Socialist who makes the poor man ready for his better day that must come; never he who speaks to him only of his wrong. It is the rich who have as sore need as the poor. I will speak to both when I can."

"And share the fate of all temporizers, in reaching neither," Slocum sneered. "You have your chance, but you choose to fling it away. You are no worker with me. Farewell; and if ever your eyes see clearer, I will come again. Destiny is stronger than you. You may meet me on my own ground at last, whether you will or no."

He flung from the room as he spoke, leaving the pair with whom he had been vainly laboring, to look at each other inquiringly.

"It is bad," Lessing said at last, as he met Dr.

Strothers's half-laughing, half-perplexed eyes. "Such voice as his, so shrieking and so cursing, men will call true Socialism, and know not what its face may certainly be. The love-spirit has no place in him, and how shall any man know without love? The rich will give, the poor will learn and be ready for the gift, when both shall love. Now they know not, and who shall make them know? It is all death, — death and blind ignorance and a waste desert. Ach, Gott! who shall alter it?"

> "'For, I say, this is death, and the sole death,
> When a man's loss comes to him from his gain,
> Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,
> And lack of love from love made manifest;
> A lamp's death when, replete with oil, it chokes;
> A stomach's when, surcharged with food, it starves,
> With ignorance was surety of a cure.'"

Dr. Strothers repeated the words half abstractedly, then smiled.

"That comes to me by the law of contraries," he said, "for it is precisely the state described that you are wailing over. But it has its bearing too. If 'with ignorance *was* surety of a cure,' certainly we may change 'was' to 'is.' Ignorance is the first condition of knowledge. It is only when a man knows it all, like your Slocum, that it is hopeless work to deal with him. For the rest, you and I hold the same faith. Love is the one eternal fact, and it must conquer all men."

Lessing's face had cleared. He drew a deep breath. "How you have it I know not," he said, "for to most it comes but in suffering. But I see it so, even in the days when I sit in my prison and think life may be there always, and I know not ever again sunshine and freedom. I said then, as it came to me in my youth, my soul was no more mine. There or elsewhere, as it might be, I gave it to my brothers,

— bond or free, yet all bond it may be, — for who sees the end, or shall know if he have done well or ill? That is not well. I know; you know. Let us go on."

"Even if it be but an inch at a time," Dr. Strothers said, as Lessing put out his hand and looked at him with the wistfulness his face of late had often held.

"My life slips fast," he said; "but you are young still, and you will speak so as I know not how. Believe. Let no false voice make you renounce what is. See — while you have gone out I take up this review and I read this here, and its answer; two people — what you will call 'the best people' — that talk together. 'We see,' one has said, 'that political systems in all progressive societies tend toward socialistic democracy. We see everywhere that it *must* come to that. We all of us feel this conviction, or all of us, I suppose, who have reflected on the matter. We feel, too, that nothing we can do can avert or possibly long delay the consummation. Then we must believe that the movement is being guided, or is guiding itself, to happy issues.' Now comes an answer: '*Hope* that the inevitable may prove the ultimately desirable, but *act* toward it in public affairs as you do in private; *i. e., ignore it altogether.*' That is what your class will do always. Not you. You are not of them, but I find in the three words, 'ignore it altogether,' the heart of to-day for most that must be done. How it is I know not, but less faith stays with me than I have owned. It is a sense of years, it may be, and I am suddenly far on — away from youth."

Dr. Strothers looked at him with sudden intentness. The expression of youth was so strong, the bearing so boyish, a sense of light-heartedness, of friendliness and overflowing interest so prevailing an

atmosphere, that Lessing and youth had seemed synonymous. There were gray threads, ordinarily hardly discernible, in his fair hair, yet to-day, as he sat in the sunshine, plain to see; while lines about eyes and mouth seemed suddenly to have deepened and emphasized. Truly middle life had come, was passing; yet this face could never grow old, for the hope and faith of youth still held their place undaunted in the gentle eyes that had looked on all sorrow, yet lost no jot of courage.

"I wonder human beings do not die of pity for one another," Dr. Strothers thought, in the moment in which he had taken in something new and subtile in life and bearing. "What do I know of this noble soul's deepest needs and struggles? What help am I on the way? — a hard way for every son and daughter of man, no matter how love may long to clear away every obstacle. I bow to this lonely, most longing, often defeated, always aspiring soul of man, and before this man I can never pay too reverent homage."

If Lessing did not read the thought, some ray of its warmth had made itself felt. He smiled, as he still held the young man's hand.

"Truly I return to my youth, as I look in your face," he said. "Were I back there, and our German ways still fresh with me, then should I embrace you gladly as a brother. Now I spare your American feelings such trouble, as any show of what they are will make itself be, to men of Anglo-Saxon blood. Yet I say to you, as our Richter has said, 'Though at times an unseen, infinite Arm seems suddenly to press us upon some new heart, yet we have always long known this heart, in the Gallery of the Saints of our longing devotion, and often taken the picture down, uncovered and adored it.' Men here, with you, have no time for friendship, yet life has lost

much that goes willingly without it. I complain not. My days bring me many things. More and more it is plain, what I say to this man who will upheave but not build, — that till we know brotherhood in its fulness, we know not God, and knowing him not, all work is idle."

"Has this been your faith always?" Dr. Strothers asked, after a moment's silence.

"Ach, no! I have lost much time with nothingness. I have believed, with Heilbrun, and with many, that we come out of darkness and go into darkness. Always underneath is Faith, in prison, and struggling to use her wings. Always the second world in me demands and will prove a second world beyond me, but I do not listen. I say there is a spirit of Love, a power that I feel, that meets often the heart in me; but because there is no God, it must well be the Spirit of Humanity, — an essence made up from the labor of great souls since time began. Then I say, what foolishness! If that endure, if it be imperishable, and truly I feel it so, then why shall not a source also endure? And of late it is plain. I will waste not time any more in denying. I believe."

Dr. Strothers's head was bowed as he repeated low: "'Behold, it saith, I am born into the great, the universal mind. I, the imperfect, adore my own Perfect. I am somehow receptive of the great soul, and thereby I do overlook the sun and the stars, and feel them to be the fair accidents and effects that change and pass. More and more the surges of everlasting nature enter into me, and I become public and human in my regards and actions.'"

"That is a high word from a high soul, but I know it not," Lessing said.

"You shall have more of him, and better," Dr. Strothers said. "In fact, if you know me well, you

will have to know him also. He has been my John the Baptist, and more; I think, indeed, one of the Messiahs. Now, will you wait till I have seen this unexpected patient, who really ought to be turned away at this hour? and while you wait you may read these pages, in which you will find the bit that repeated itself."

The call was a short one; and as it ended, and Dr. Strothers came once more into the private office, he was struck anew by the expression of weariness, almost discouragement, on Lessing's face.

"I think you are homesick," he said, as Lessing looked up and met his questioning eyes. "You want Felix back again, — Felix and Meg. Come round with me to Mrs. Herndon's. She is planning something, I think, for Sandy McCullum's daughter, — your last waif and stray, you know, in your 'Stranger's Rest.' 'Tramp's Retreat' would be a better name, judging from some of the specimens I have seen emerging from it. Something must be done for her, but I don't see exactly what. There 's nothing to get hold of. Here; sit down in the Square a moment, and taste this breeze. Well flavored for a city breeze, is n't it? There goes Miss Biggs down the steps. On the whole, I am glad of it, for we shall be allowed wider range without her than with her."

Lessing's attention had wandered. He had risen from the seat they had taken first, and, after a moment, crossed over to another, motioning Dr. Strothers to follow.

"Pardon," he said, "but it is long since I have been here, and I thought not to come again. I looked at it the morning Meg is gone away, but I would not enter."

"Why not?" Dr. Strothers asked presently, as Lessing showed no sign of going on.

"Because it has bad memories. Yet why say I so,

when out of it is come a great good? Do you know that here I sit on that day Meg is here with her baby, and wait till night is come, that she may die? Here I sit till I see her. And the same thought is with me. I am tired of all struggle, and no result that will show. Tired of bitter words, and small love, and always the sight of what goes wrong. Till I look at her face, I am sick to death, and say I shall let death end it, and struggle no more. But her face! Ach, Gott! What a look! I know it; and as I see what is there, I think no more my own thoughts, but hers, and I say in my mind, 'She shall be saved.' Eight years, and now once more I think again how to save her."

"What is wrong, Lessing?"

"All is wrong. I know not, after this time, in which I teach her nothing, how now it shall begin to be plain. It was my theory, you see. I said she should open eyes for herself. Never would I hasten the time, or prop eyelids that of themselves will close. But the time comes not. She is a single mind, you call it, that asks not questions — only obeys. What wish I have, so small as it may be, she will make hers; and more and more she knows my work and helps it as she can. If Felix had voice it would question; his eyes are all question. But for her, she knows not and thinks not as we go on. Once, in early spring it is — I sit and look at her. I think I will tell her now what I believe, and what is comfort for all. I say, 'Meg, I have not said even to you that Love is alive, — that a God lives that is love, and has care for you and me.' She laughed a little when she looked up, and saw I meant it all. 'I want no God,' she said; 'you are God enough for me.' 'But that cannot be,' I said. 'I have wrong, Meg, that I wait so long and say never what I believe.' 'You are never wrong,' she has said; 'I like to be as I am,

and you need not to tell me new things, except things I can learn.' 'Learn this, then, Meg,' I say to her: 'no soul can go alone. You care not, and I have not cared, till at once I see that this thing I have called the Spirit of Humanity, that is the Eternal Spirit, the hope, the end, of all life. Think of it, Meg, and as you think — not now, but other days — we will talk.' She looks at me only with those deep eyes that say more than is there, it may be, though I cannot think it so; and then it is but a little while that she is gone and I am left with the child, who cries every night and holds to me. And always I think, 'Had I told her only in the beginning, she would not be now so lost, for it was lost always I thought her; dragged away by a power I knew not. Now she is lost in truth; for sorrow has buried her deep, and out of it she will not come. I think sometimes she shall die, and make that passage alone because I have not made clear to her that Love is there and bears the soul over to such life as may come. That I know. But how shall I make her know?'"

Lessing's eyes were wet. His head drooped on his breast as he ended.

"You would have more faith if you had a little more strength," Dr. Strothers said earnestly. "It came to you when the time was ripe, and it could not come before. Be equally certain that the seed is sown with her, and that a little patient waiting will give you leaf and flower. In her nature all processes are slow, half unconscious, yet you see how she grows. It is a noble soul, and illumination will not fail it. The divine powers work whether we are one with them or not. And now, Lessing, take my word as a physician. You are on the point of breaking down, unless you stop short and go to the country. Your life must change absolutely for a time."

Lessing shook his head. "I want no change. I want only — "

"To have your own way unquestioned," Dr. Strothers interrupted. "That is over with; for at present I appoint myself the interrogation point for your life, and demand answers after my own mind, not after yours."

Lessing smiled as he met the resolute eyes, then rose.

"The day speeds," he said, "and my work not done. I go now, but there is time to think. Auf wiedersehen!" And, with a wave of the hand, he hurried away.

"Now, this is a singular thing," Dr. Strothers said to himself, as he watched the tall figure disappearing in the distance. "Your church people — good, solid orthodox, like my grandfather, for instance — would say this was a clear case of anxiety for another soul's salvation, till they knew that no question of atonement, no word of saving power in Christ, nor any of those old formulas, had entered in. Then I suppose it would all come under the head of unsanctified impulse, — a more or less sentimental leaning on an aid impossible to any without the pale. Yet it is men like that that are the real believers, the real redeemers. The Christ spirit — all of Christ that means anything for the world — is alive in him and his kind, and through them many Megs will be saved that the church has passed by unheeded. Somehow or other he must be made to leave the town, and have change, or he will suddenly slip away to the other country, where he shall not go yet, if I can help it."

Simmons beamed as he opened the door, which he had often of late expressed a wish to board up altogether. Miss Biggs he had decided to tolerate, because evidently his adored mistress found mysterious and inexplicable satisfaction in her visits; but there

were many others in the daily stream of petitioners that vexed his inmost soul. He knew them all, from the assured bearer of a subscription list to the people with patents for which a little money must be raised, or the begging letter-writers who sometimes pressed their claims in person.

"Declar' for gracious!" he said, at times, when he had announced one or another with a word or two of description, clairvoyant in its keen perception. "Feels like as if this was a kind o' branch office fur de Tombs, an' I was police justice an' constable all done up in one bundle. It'll be a mighty good thing when we gits into de country, an' Miss Margaret she has a rest."

June had come, with no hint of the usual move, and Simmons had that morning hazarded a question.

"Miss Margaret, you're a-losin' de cream ob de year, even if you is mighty nigh some trees an' grass in de Square. Foxgrove's a-lookin' mighty nice jest about now, an' you ought to be thinkin' about your health a little now, had n't you? — you that's been in all such bad-smellin', fevery places de whole winter."

Face and voice were both expostulatory and persuasive. Since the advent of the old cousins, and the constant hearing of her name, Simmons had chosen to drop the formal title "Mrs. Herndon," and, following the pleasant Southern fashion, that gives to men the oldest a sense of youth, called her "Miss Margaret," as if she had been a child of the house he still delighted to honor.

"Need n't tell me there ain't Virginny blood somewhar," he said. "None o' your or'nary, common Yankee about her, nor none o' her folks. If she was anyways interested, now, in anything you 'd think maybe she would be, she'd look it up who her fam'ly was, all de way back. They 're quality, anyhow; but,

sure 's you 're born, there 's Virginny mixed in, one end or t' other of the line."

Dr. Strothers turned for a moment as the door opened and looked out to the old Square, the towers of St. George's rising clear against the deep blue of the sky, fainter toward the horizon, where the smoke of the great city invaded the blue, and in turn was triumphed over, absorbed, and made part of the summer glory. The breath from new-cut hay came on the warm wind, and for a moment he bared his head and stood there as if doing reverence.

"Miss Margaret's in the library, an' ready to see anybody that ain't a tramp," Simmons said suggestively.

"Is she ready to see anybody that wants to be one?" Dr. Strothers replied, as he went down the hall, leaving Simmons to ponder anew why city people seemed to want the country more than the country people ever thought of wanting the city.

The spirit of June had found its way into the shadowy library. Mrs. Herndon was in white, with violets at neck and belt; and about the open windows, at the end, the old grape-vine climbed lawlessly.

"She grows younger every day," Dr. Strothers said to himself, as he shook hands, and noted the eager look he remembered in the girl. Aloud, his word gave no clew to the inward comment.

"I have been arranging a mission for you," he said. "I wonder if you want another. It makes no difference, though, whether you do or not. It is laid upon you."

"Well," Mrs. Herndon said presently, as he sat there, apparently quite content with silence, "how am I to go upon it if I am not told what it is?"

"I was only straightening a detail or two about which I was uncertain. I want you to make Lessing willing to go into the country."

"He is not ill, I hope?" Mrs. Herndon said, with sudden anxiety.

"No and yes. He is worn out, and must have a change if he is to escape complete collapse. He will not go unless he feels that in going he helps others as well as himself. Now, this is what I think about. That little English child, especially, and the whole five, for that matter, need the country. My patient is on crutches now, but would drop them by fall if she were in pure air all summer. Then there is my small hunchback, who managed somehow to be an office-boy, but lost his place when he came down with typhoid fever, born of the sewer he lives over; and there is another case quite as forlorn, but of a different order, that I shall tell you about presently. Now, just suppose you had knowledge of the right sort of place, and should get Lessing to go up with them and take charge of them. He loves children, and he knows capitally well exactly what they need. A private 'country week' of your own, you see; only it should be months, not weeks."

"Evidently you are of the same mind as Miss Biggs," Mrs. Herndon said with a smile. "She has been proving to-day, to her own satisfaction, and, on the whole, I think to mine also, that my chief use in the world is for emergencies. 'You had ought to make up your mind that there had ought to be somebody for unexpectedness,' she said. 'Now, take me. There I was, wanderin' round, an' did n't need a thing but just a word an' one night's takin' in, to set me up in business, an' there wa'n't nothin' reg'lar that 'd as much as look at me. There 's plenty for reg'lar doin's. You an' me 's jined in irreg'lar ones, and you 'd ought to be thankful it 's so, an' that we 've got a chance to be nat'ral an' forth-puttin' in our own way.'"

It was Miss Biggs's voice that spoke; and Dr.

Strothers laughed his soft, genial laugh, as he noted this new phase, the return to a girlish habit long ago dropped with many other things.

"In what direction is the next 'forth-puttin'' to be?" he asked.

"Foxgrove, I think. I have been turning over the possibilities of the place. There is room enough there for forty children, if it were not so gorgeous. I am going up to-morrow to prepare the mind of Mrs. Beebe, who has been its housekeeper for eight years. I anticipate a battle, because she abhors change; but she is a good woman, and will bear up, perhaps, when she knows its nature. I will tell her that everything must be arranged for a large family, and that its direction, except as to meals and so on, will be in Lessing's hands. Then I will go and see him, and tell him the plan cannot be carried out unless he helps, and in that way we shall get him there. As to Rose, — poor Sandy McCullum's daughter, you know, — I have settled to send her up to Deepmouth, and Miss Biggs will take her to-morrow. I think it will rouse Meg, and help her more than anything that can be done. The case is in some points a little like her own, and I have written to her that I want her to try and save Rose if she can."

"Nothing could be better for both," Dr. Strothers said briefly.

"I shall divide myself between the three places," Mrs. Herndon went on. "This house must stay open, for various reasons. I cannot feel willing to leave a good many things that have just begun, and so I shall come and go, a sort of travelling inspector, you see, and, I suppose, in time, growing quite certain what I had better do with my income. Come in, Simmons."

"It 's a note, Miss Margaret, that Mrs. Longshore's man brought down, and there had to be an answer.

The kerridge is at the do'," Simmons said, with a deprecating look toward Dr. Strothers. Mrs. Herndon opened the note, with a word of apology, and read: —

Margaret, my darling, I do not believe Bert can live through another day unless he sees you and talks over some terrible things that have happened. Can you come up at once? for he is getting into a greater fever every moment. I did not mean to tell you a word of any of it, because I thought it might all pass, but I see that it will not. My heart is broken, and I don't care for anything.

Your devoted SALLY.

"I can't understand it in the least," Mrs. Herndon said, as she re-read the note, and then looked up at Dr. Strothers. "Has anything happened at the Longshores'?"

"Nothing but a resurrection, and the beginning of reconstruction."

"Nothing but a general upheaval of everything could bring such a state to pass."

"That is exactly what has taken place."

"Then why didn't you tell me? What do you mean?"

"I didn't tell you because I had promised to be silent till Mr. Longshore himself felt ready to speak; and I mean that whatever soul and conscience he has have come to full daylight, and at present are as uncomfortable under the sensation as the inhabitants of the patch of ground from which a stone has just been dislodged."

"I think you love mysteries. What sort of inferences am I to draw from such a statement?"

"None at all. You will hear him, and you will help him. He has suffered much, but you will not regret it when you know the whole. And to prevent my-

self from saying anything more, I shall run now, and come again day after to-morrow, if you will allow me, to know how the Foxgrove embassy has sped, and what you will do with Lessing. I have other things to tell you also, but they will wait."

Dr. Strothers hurried away; and Mrs. Herndon, after a pause in which she tried to think what could possibly be going on in the minds of these two Longshores, suddenly decided that the reasonable method of finding out would be to go and see, and hastened to make ready. Mrs. Longshore flew down as the carriage finally stopped before the door, her eyes swollen with crying, and every small affectation forgotten.

"I shall die, Margaret, if you can't make Bert feel better," she said, with a fresh gush of tears. "I think it 's that awful fall downstairs, and that he 's out of his head a little. For there he sits, and he has for three days, and reports, up to his eyes, piled round, and he won't let me take one away. And forty times a day he says he 's a rascal, and swears at himself, and won't listen to me a minute. For all the world, don't encourage him, Margaret. It 's no use asking you, because of course you will; but if you ever cared one fig about me, do be moderate and reasonable."

She had led her up the stairs as she poured out her appeal, and now opened the door of her sitting-room to the bewildered Margaret, who saw, in the anxious but quiet and determined face turned toward her no trace of the excitement indicated by his wife.

"It can't be possible they have quarrelled," Margaret thought. "I can't imagine anything else that would upset Sally so. How hot his hand is!"

Mr. Longshore had put out his hand silently; and she looked at him in consternation, as his face flushed and his eyes filled with tears.

"My dear Bert! what is it?" was all she could say; for a sense of some sudden calamity had come to her, and she grew very pale. "You have n't heard anything of——"

She stopped short, but Mr. Longshore had not noticed her agitation.

"I thought Strothers might have told you, Margaret," he said. "No, I remember I charged him to say nothing. You'll understand when I tell you that Miss Biggs came to see me three days ago."

"Ah!" Mrs. Herndon said, with a long breath, as the sharp anxiety left her eyes, and she sat down near him.

"Margaret, if you did send her, after all her saying you did n't, I'll never forgive you as long as I live," Mrs. Longshore said vehemently. "Did you?"

"No," Margaret answered quietly. "Tell me the whole, Bert, for evidently there is something very wrong."

"Everybody is wrong but Bert, and I wish I was dead!" cried Mrs. Longshore, and fled from the room, unable to bear a repetition of the horror. Margaret's serious, attentive eyes did not leave his face as he went on, repeating almost word for word the experience he had given Dr. Strothers. They were quieting as well as attentive eyes; and as he poured out the story, he gained courage.

"There 's the whole horrible mass," he said, as he ended; "and now, Margaret, you must tell me exactly what you would do if you were in my place. You see what I have been about. I wanted to know if I was a sinner above other men; and as I could n't get out to see with my own eyes, I sent down to Delaplaine for anything he had in the way of report or treatise. I knew he was more or less of a hobbyist, but I did not expect such a response as came. Evidently he emptied his shelf, and sent up minute

directions in what order to take them. I 've been taking them, and they are uncomfortable eye-openers. I am resolved on some definite action as soon as possible, but feel helpless, — in fact, half sick with the whole question. And I want to act, not talk, Margaret. I want to know what I had better *do*."

"I have not been so successful myself, Bert," Mrs. Herndon said, after a moment's silence, "that I can point the way out of greater difficulties than I have ever met. But it sums up easily, does n't it?

> 'The proper process of unsinning sin
> Is to begin well-doing somehow else.'"

"Exactly. Now a plan is forming mistily, and I want you to hear it, and see how you think it may work — provided you have faith enough in a man who would n't open his eyes, to believe that they really are open at last."

"I believe that, and a great deal more," Mrs. Herndon said, as she put out her hand eagerly. "I have been waiting for this. I knew it would come, — I knew it! You were good, Bert; but, oh, how much better you are going to be!"

"Your faith and my works are to make out a case for me," Mr. Longshore said. "Well, we will see."

XVI.

DEEPMOUTH had watched with always increasing interest the exciting transformations in every tradition and habit of the Wentworth mansion. The first surprising fact was the appearance of a child ranging at will through the old garden, plain to see through the pickets that shut out the public, yet gave them glimpses of the formal beds planned by a generation that liked set forms and box borders, all that was sweet and spicy and odorous. People, as they passed, had always stopped for a moment under the three elms set out by Miss Marcia's grandfather when he came home from his last voyage, and devoted such days as remained for the solid earth to planting and planning, as his father had planted and planned before him. Under the south parlor window roses, damask and creamy white, held the place given them by hands long since dust. The herb bed, dear to the first Madam Wentworth, had its store of balm and mint, and the fennel, a sprig of which was still carried surreptitiously to church by Miss Marcia. Polyanthus and daffodils and Star of Bethlehem and small purple hyacinths had the same corner known to her childhood; and along the western side a thicket of currant and gooseberry bushes still yielded a supply amazing to any one who considered the character of the parent stems, knotty and weather-beaten as the original planter. Through it all Felix ranged at will, his great eyes shining and his eager hands touching caressingly flower or leaf. He rolled in the short

grass of the front yard like a young colt, taking sharp, sudden runs, and returning to throw himself flat and rub his face against the green, or, lying motionless under a tree, watched the birds come and go, and the sunshine flicker through the leaves. There were minutes when he laid his ear against the rough bark, and listened with some strange inward sense to the sound that could only be felt, — the rhythm of the current that rose and fell in every inch of the mysterious growth, to which his own blood seemed to answer.

"I feel it," he said to his mother, as she questioned why he did it, and watched his hesitation before, at last, he gave her his thought, on fingers moving so quickly that Miss Erminia watched in vain to discover where one word ended and another began. "I can count it, one two, one two, like my own heart, and it draws me tight. Was I ever a tree?"

Meg shook her head as Felix pressed close to her and looked eagerly into her eyes.

"I wish we were both trees," she said, half aloud, "and could be side by side in the sun and the wind, and the sky always over us. I think it would be good to be a tree."

Felix touched her lips wistfully. He could read them now, such words as had been made familiar to him, and Meg knew that in time they would talk together, almost as if speech had never been denied, and wondered how it would seem. He watched every one intently, when conversation was going on, smiling with delight when he made out a word here and there, and spelling out his view of the sentence to Miss Marcia, who practised the single alphabet assiduously, and considered herself honored when Felix signified his readiness for some conversation. But his chief interest was the garden; and he gave hours at a time to a new flower, touching the leaves, looking

into its heart, as if there the secret of its growth might be plain, and returning to it, to sit before it, as if waiting some new yet never unexpected development. He seldom picked any, though told daily to take all he wanted. To look, and now and then to touch, seemed to meet every wish; and Miss Erminia, who had been in terror as she watched his first excited rush up and down the paths, looked on with wonder, and settled that such discretion must be the effect of most remarkable self-control.

Between two black-walnut trees, at the south side of the house, a hammock had been slung in defiance of all Deepmouth convictions that hammocks were solely for sailors; and in it Meg lay many hours a day, watching Felix as he ranged, and wondering more and more what it all might mean to him. She had loved the woods in her own childhood, but rather for the freedom they brought — the escape from Granny and blows and unwelcome tasks — than with any sense of their beauty or the gift they held for the seeker. She remembered how she longed for them in the days before Felix came to her, and how, often, as she leaned from the narrow city window, where the sun beat in, and the horrible gutter sent up its stench, a breath of the pines seemed to come, and she shut her eyes and saw again the cool, dark shadows of the wood behind the swamp at Edgeton.

"I used to think I heard voices in the trees," she thought, as she saw the intent look on the boy's face, "but it was all fancy for me. It is n't for him. He hears, I know, something we can't, or he 'd never have that look. I wish Berthold could see him."

Meg had few wishes. For the most part she lay silently in her hammock, too languid to move, and only knowing that the air was sweet and the sunshine good. Miss Erminia read to her energetically, testing some of her favorite treatises upon her, and

writing long reports of her condition to Mrs. Herndon and Dr. Strothers. Neighbors came and went, looking curiously toward the beautiful dark face that smiled only at rare moments, and seemed as apart from them all as a nun behind her black veil. The slight mystery charmed Miss Erminia.

"She is an old friend of Mrs. Herndon," she said, "and we are afraid she is in a decline."

A young widow, the neighbors settled, when they had at last discovered that she was called Mrs. Lee, and that the boy was deaf and dumb. Meg had looked imploringly at Miss Marcia, when told that she must be ready to hear herself thus addressed.

"Why can't I keep on being just Meg?" she said.

"Because, my dear, that would sound very strangely to people. Naturally, every one asks your name, or the boy's, and you must accustom yourself to hearing it, without showing how it troubles you. I don't suppose it ever entered Margaret's head how embarrassing it might be," she added to herself, with a gush of pity as she saw a tear creep down Meg's cheek. "You must n't let things discourage you so, child. You 'll never get well if you do. Your life is all before you. Who knows what good times are coming?"

Meg shook her head.

"My good times will never come again," she said. "I 'm wicked to make you all so much trouble, and I wish I could go away somewhere and hide where nobody would ever be troubled again. I can't, I suppose, and so I shall have to die."

"I won't hear such talk," said Miss Marcia, severely. "If you 'll only eat what I bring you, and not think every minute of the time, you 've fifty years before you yet. You 've got to live for the boy. How is he to get along without you?"

Meg made no answer as Miss Marcia stood looking at her, and at last trotted away to try some new rule

in the Wentworth receipt book, that might be more successful in tempting her than the last. Felix ran up to her; and she roused to answer the rapid movement of his fingers, and then kept him there as she made him read from her lips some of the sentences he had already learned to speak. She dreaded it; for training had as yet given no natural tones to the long silent organ, and the rough, unmodulated voice seemed an entire contradiction to the beautiful face and eyes that hardly needed voice to tell their story.

"They laughed at me," he said presently, in finger language, as she spelled out the name of the flower he had been watching, — pansies. "I saw them laugh, and I laughed back. They know me, and I 'm going to talk to them."

He went back, and for an hour gave himself to entertaining the pansy bed, his fingers flying as he told his small experiences, stopping now and then to touch the tiny faces turned toward him.

"He would n't miss me," Meg thought. "I 've done all I can for him; and if I were only out of the way, Mrs. Herndon would take him somewhere, or Lessing would watch him. It takes a great while to die."

Meg lay down again, and shut her eyes. She would never think again of killing herself, much as she might at moments dwell upon it, for Lessing had said only a coward would ever do that; but she wanted to slip away quietly. The dull pain in her side kept on. She could hardly move without coughing. Dr. Strothers had written that the broken rib had probably bruised the lung, and that quiet and life in the open air would be the best medicine. If she could only stop thinking, perhaps both would do more good; but as she lay there hour by hour this wretched past unrolled before her, — every foul word or act or sight that had entered her life.

"How shall I get rid of it again?" she moaned to herself. "Oh, if somebody could only take it all away and hide it, and I never know again anything about it! What makes it come when I forgot for all those years? I think if I could go to Jerry again, I would ask him, though I could n't understand. Lessing says love is everywhere, and Jerry said Jesus was everywhere and helped everybody; but the two can't be the same. I want to know. Oh, how I want to know!"

Through Meg's heavy heart stole once more the words that had drawn her into the mission that evening in April, —

> "For weary feet remains a street
> Of wondrous pave and golden;
> For hearts that ache the angels wake
> The story sweet and olden."

"'Going home to-morrow,'" she repeated. "I don't know where, but it felt then as if there were a home for everybody. Oh, if there is, let me have it; let me have it!"

Miss Marcia shook her head as she followed Meg up the stairs that night, noting the difficulty with which she moved, and the long gasp as she reached the top.

"She must have a room downstairs," she said to herself. "She is getting weaker every day instead of better, and I 'm sure I don't know what to do next. To kill the man that made the mischief would be the most satisfactory performance; but if all the men who have made trouble for women were killed off, I 'm afraid there would be as awful a surplus of unmarried women for the universe as there is now for Massachusetts."

Miss Marcia smiled grimly as she descended the stairs, and then looked reflectively at the portrait of

Great-grandfather Wentworth, whose dark, eager eyes her own had copied. Fortunately there were a few men who might be spared instant execution, and this had been one of them. She went to the front door, open always in these summer days, in the inviting Deepmouth fashion, and looked down the long walk to the gate from which Miss Erminia had just turned with the evening mail in her hand.

"How 's your patient?" Captain Drummond called; and Miss Marcia answered, with sudden cheer, "I think she will soon take a turn," and then wondered how she could so belie her own thought. "From Margaret," she said as she turned over the letters. "A thick one, too."

Miss Erminia sat down expectantly. There was always some little excitement now with every letter, and she listened as Miss Marcia read slowly the forlorn story Margaret had decided to tell in full of Rose McCullum's fate and prospects.

"You don't mean she is to come here?" she said, with a little shriek. "My dear Marcia! I 'm very sorry for the girl, of course, but this is going a little too far. We don't keep a reformatory."

"And she is not the sort they send to reformatories, Erminia. A poor child that has got to suffer everything, and that it 's clearly our duty to take in."

"You have n't always thought that way, Marcia."

"More shame to me, then," Miss Marcia said energetically. "You can go to the Springs any day you like, Erminia, and let me take the brunt of it. There is n't any brunt. She is n't known here, and nothing whatever need be asked or answered."

"It will be, all the same," Miss Erminia answered, after an indignant pause.

"Then we will tell the truth," Miss Marcia said. "Our name does n't mean much if it will not enable us to do any right thing we are called upon to do.

Margaret is right. If anything will rouse Meg, it will be the sight of another in just such trouble as she has known. Margaret has a wise head, Erminia, — a very wise head."

"Margaret has never had any experience, Marcia, and can't be expected to know how such things seem. It worked very well with Meg, for Meg is a wonderful creature. You 'll never convince me she was the child of tramps. Hands and all, she is a lady. Not that they 're small, but they are such a handsome shape, and no knobs at the wrist, like most hands. Marcia, I should like to understand knobs. Do you know, I have been looking at hands lately. The Metaphysical Metamorphosis woman said there was a great deal in hands; and unless a person had the right kind, they were always unsuccessful in life. Now, knobs and bulges certainly must have a bearing on your destiny; yet there 's Mrs. Drummond, who is nothing *but* knob, you might say, and yet never had a trouble in her life. Well, I won't say that, but never had any hard work anyway, and never goes into her kitchen, or knows or cares what Almira is about."

Miss Marcia looked down at her own hands, small and brown and slender, but seldom considered in the light of anything demanding much attention. Miss Erminia's were white, but long and limp and nerveless; weighted with old-fashioned rings which Felix examined curiously, and carrying with them always a sense of entire inadequacy to daily demands. Meg's coming had given them definite occupation for many days; for when not reading to her, Miss Erminia sewed busily, making one and another addition to the slender wardrobe, and slipping it into the bureau drawers, a world too wide and deep for their contents. Meg's dainty neatness was another surprise to Miss Erminia, who slopped and smeared

and tore, and whose raiment had all, at one time or another, been drenched with benzine and ammonia, and an unending series of patent cleansers.

"I should think you were on shipboard and could n't keep your feet," Miss Marcia said at moments. "What does make you lurch so, Erminia?"

"It 's inherited tendency," Miss Erminia answered seriously. "Really, Marcia, I should think more of you if you did it, too, instead of slipping through everything like a cat. The descendant of four generations of sailors ought to lurch. That 's my opinion."

"What will you do with the girl?" she had asked, after a long silence. "Does she know how to do anything?"

"Margaret says — did n't you notice? — that she does wonderful crocheting, — like Irish lace, you know. I shall have her make me a set, and I think Mrs. Perrine will take one, too. There is that piece of gingham I bought to make aprons for the five Martin children, and she will have sewing for herself. But she must be out a good deal, too. We shall know, when she comes."

"I don't know how Meg will take it," Miss Erminia said discontentedly. "Shall you tell her?"

"I will read her the letter," Miss Marcia answered, "all but the part about herself. But she is so weak, I don't know as it will make any impression at all. If Dr. Strothers were not so strenuous about her, I should call in old Dr. May. I 'm inclined to, anyway."

"If she 's going to die, she shall die undrugged," said Miss Erminia, severely. "I 'm amazed at you, Marcia, when you know that the one sensible thing about Paul Strothers is that he never gives medicine if he can help it."

Captain Drummond hobbled in at this juncture; and Miss Erminia's attention was soon concentrated on his hands, which, like his wife's, were a series of knobs, calculated, if the theory of the Metaphysical Metamorphosis expounder were correct, to end his days in the poorhouse.

"If you're going to play at all, Erminia, suppose you look at your cards once in a while," he said at last, with strong indignation; and Miss Erminia roused herself sufficiently to be beaten intelligently, and went to bed still meditating on the real bearing upon existence of knuckles and wrist-joints.

Meg crept out to her hammock the next morning, led by Felix, who had helped her dress, and who looked at her with questioning wonder as she moved languidly about. It had rained in the night, and the grass was still beaded with drops; but the sky was clear, and the air filled with the fresh smell of the earth and the scent of the sweet clover just in blossom. Silas had slung the hammock and spread a strip of carpet from it to the path, that Meg's feet might not be dampened, and looked commiseratingly now from the barn door as he watched her slow step. Miss Marcia came out presently with a cup of beef tea, and sat down in the little camp-chair that held its place by the hammock. Meg drank a spoonful or two, then handed back the cup, which Miss Marcia took silently and put on the ground at her side.

"I wish you would n't take such pains," Meg said. "I don't want to eat. I 'd rather never eat again."

"I am going to read you a letter from Mrs. Herndon," was all Miss Marcia's answer; and Meg looked up eagerly.

"Is she coming?" she asked.

"Not till you begin to get better. It would make her sick to see how you are letting yourself grow worse and worse every day. She wants you to get

well, and you refuse to. I thought you cared enough for her to try and please her."

"I do, I do!" Meg cried. "I don't want to make her trouble. I would do anything for her."

"Let me see if you will do one thing," Miss Marcia said seriously, and, opening the letter, she read it very slowly, watching as she read what the effect might be. Meg had turned away her face, and made no comment as it ended; and Miss Marcia went in at once, forgetting the beef tea, which, while the reading went on, had been lapped with surprised but calm enjoyment by Captain Cuttle, the family cat.

The noon train brought Miss Biggs and her charge, not much more than a child, in whose face sullenness contended with frightened shyness. It was swollen and stained with crying; and the bright blue eyes were clouded with the tears that came constantly, and against which the girl fought angrily. Miss Biggs was still an object of suspicion and dislike, some one who knew her story and would tell it wherever they went. She had refused at first to go with her, and Sandy McCullum groaned as she said, —

"I 'm half-way to the devil, father, and there 's no pulling back now."

"I would n't think so myself if I hadna been talked into it," he said. "It 's no me would 'a' thought you could be having a start anywhere; but the doctor knows one will help you, Rose, and says she 'll see you through, whatever 't is that 'll come."

"I'll not be sent off. I like best to stay where I belong," Rose said. "Who 's this that 's ordering me all at once?"

"She 's there to speak for herself," Sandy said, as he turned and saw Mrs. Herndon, who stood at the open door, and signed to him to leave them together. The younger children and their mother were in the back room, and there was no one to interrupt; and

Sandy shut the door softly, as if in a church, and Rose looked up, ashamed, yet comforted, into the face that seemed to her the face of an angel. How it happened she could not have told; but as she looked the tears came again, and she sank down on the floor and buried her head in her arms, and would not move till a hand took hers, and a voice she could not disobey said, softly yet firmly, —

"Now, poor child, tell me all about it."

"I never thought I would come to that," Rose said at last, when she had told the old, sad story. "I was an honest girl, and I thought Tim meant to be honest too. Father did n't like him, but he had n't much to say. Tim got ten dollars a week himself, alone, an' ten was all father an' me together could earn, an' mother in there sick, an' the children all to be fed, seven of us, and medicine to be bought, that just a bottle, maybe, would take the whole day's earnings. It was nothing but work, work, work all day, and then half the night wash and mend, and do for them what I could, and father that discouraged he 'd go days an' say a never a word. Tim was sorry for me, and he said I 'd have easier times after a while, and he took me out sometimes, when the girl above here, Kitty Mooney, was good-natured, and would lend her hat and a jacket. And then there came that night, when I 'd gone up the Avenue a bit for a change, and, coming back, somebody jumped out from behind a door and frightened me so I ran in to Mrs. Rooney's, that I knew, and wanted her to go home with me. They 'd beer, and were all drinking, and Tim came in with more — and — and — "

Rose burst again into weeping.

"You know it all," she said. "I was going to be good, but I never shall be good any more."

"You will be better than you have ever been, because you will be wiser," Mrs. Herndon said gently.

"Your father has told you what I want. Will you do just what I ask you, because I ask you? You can help yourself, and you can help me also."

"The children!" the girl said. "They can't get along without me. I did n't mean I would n't take care of them. I meant to if father would let me; but he thought there 'd never be a chance for me again. I don't see why you think there is."

"Even if you had chosen to go wrong, I should say there was a chance; but when you did not choose — when it was all a horrible wrong and shame, it would be wicked not to see that you were taken from it. I shall not let the children suffer, Rose, and you must go. You shall go to-morrow."

Rose objected no longer, and even forgot a little of the misery when Miss Biggs came in with a cheap suit and a little hat that Mrs. Herndon had bought on the way home, and sent to her new charge. The surprise of this wealth, the night on the boat, and the long ride from Norwich to Boston, all diverted her mind; but when they had crossed the city and were waiting to take the Deepmouth train, a sudden sense of loneliness and fear came upon her, and she cried, till sympathetic people came to ask if something could not be done, and made suggestions at which Miss Biggs sniffed with indignation.

"She 's hysteriky, an' she ain't very well, an' I don't blame her a mite," she said; "but there ain't nothin' to do but jest let her alone."

The fortnight that followed her arrival was one that tried Miss Marcia's inmost soul. Miss Biggs deposited her charge, shook her head grimly over Meg's changed appearance, and left the next morning with the announcement that she meant to get to the top of everything in Boston that had a top — Bunker Hill Monument and the State House dome heading her list — before she took the boat train for New York.

"I 'd 'a' stayed over an' give you the climb with me, if you had n't been so upset," she said to Rose; "an' if you 're a little more like folks when we go back, I 'll do it yet."

"I 'm afraid it 's going to spoil everything," Miss Marcia said, before two days had passed, as she watched Miss Erminia's increasing jealousy of the newcomer, who, eagerly as she obeyed the least hint of direction, was an alien element. Miss Erminia felt that her rights were invaded if Rose took her place near the hammock, and listened suspiciously to any talk between the two, upbraiding Meg for the interest she showed at once, and at last charging her with ingratitude and indifference toward those to whom she owed the most.

"It will be better for you and for us all if you go to the Springs just as usual, Erminia," Miss Marcia said, one day, in desperation; and Miss Erminia at once dissolved in tears.

"I never thought, Marcia, that you would try to drive me out of my own home, and care for anybody and everybody more than you do for your own sister."

"If you would only be a little more reasonable, Erminia, you would see yourself how absurd such remarks are. I thought you meant to carry out Margaret's wishes where you could."

"And so I did, and so I would, if she had n't spoiled everything sending this awful girl up here. She watches me every minute, and it would n't surprise me any day if she tried to burn the house down. If Margaret wants her taken care of, she had better come and see to her herself."

Miss Marcia compressed her lips, but was silent. Unless Miss Erminia could be induced to go away the experiment was a failure. Meg's face showed too plainly her anxiety lest she should displease, and

Rose shut herself up with innumerable aprons for the Martin children, and cried half the day. Even Felix felt the change, and looked questioningly at Miss Erminia, who would have regained lost ground if she could, and, failing in this, became daily more unreasonable and suspicious. The atmosphere was intolerable, and Miss Marcia hesitated whether to interfere personally or wait for Margaret's coming as the solution of all difficulties.

Felix had been pushed away, and at last, one afternoon when Meg had cried, Miss Marcia went to her desk and wrote to Mrs. Herndon that it was evident philanthropy and Erminia were incompatible, and that the only course remaining was to send Rose somewhere else. "I sometimes almost wish that things could settle back into the old lines," she added at the end. "Erminia has ruled so long that any change she dislikes is impossible, and I feel that I can only work in familiar channels, leaving the untried ones for those who are just beginning. Meg does not gain, and needs something we cannot give her. Come as soon as you can, and let us settle matters. I only grieve that I must disappoint you."

The fortnight had brought many changes. Lessing, so far from objecting, had caught at the offered chance, and presented at once a list of children who should share the privilege if possible. The housekeeper, a little indignant at first, and declaring she had never engaged to run an asylum, yielded at last; and though she groaned as two of the great rooms were dismantled and a dozen small beds took the place of the former furniture, remarked to herself as she saw Mrs. Herndon's delighted interest: "Poor thing! She 's had trouble enough, and ought to have her way now if she wanted to tear it all down and start again."

Lessing was incomprehensible. A gentleman, evidently, — more a gentleman than many she had seen

under the same roof, — yet in a workman's dress, and playing with these children, or teaching them, as simply as though he were but a child himself.

"I thought it was ten to one that he was just a designin' scamp, that meant to get anything out of you he could," Mrs. Beebe remarked to Mrs. Herndon, after a week or two of careful watching; "but there ain't half the guile in him that there is in some of the young ones. You know better 'n I thought you did."

The two worked together so cordially that the place seemed at once to take on a new character. Heilbrun went up for a day, enraging Mrs. Beebe by his apparent indifference, but nodding his unqualified approbation as he saw what happiness the new work had brought. The wistful look had not left Lessing's face, but it showed only at moments.

"He ought to have Felix under his wing again," Dr. Strothers thought, as he watched him one afternoon, having gone up in the noon train for a look at his little patient; and as he looked he decided to speak to Mrs. Herndon if any opening came. Such opening was already waiting; for that afternoon had brought Miss Marcia's letter, and as he went in on his return from Foxgrove to report the condition of things, he found her with it in her hand, and listened as she read a part of it.

"It is a most surprising result," she said at last, as she ended. "I felt so certain that it would work well for all of them that I am a little confounded to find out how mistaken I have been."

"It is curious how the flabby member of the family always dominates the stronger ones," Dr. Strothers said. "Miss Erminia feels that she always gives way, and that her sister's imperiousness carries everything before it; yet the fact is that the whole household revolves about her, and it is impossible for Miss

Marcia to be selfish enough to insist on her own rights. But I am glad it has happened; for now I can say something that has been on my mind, and that I did not feel certain about."

"About Meg?" Mrs. Herndon asked, as she looked up suddenly from the letter on which her eyes had been bent.

"About Lessing first, and Meg next. Meg has failed steadily, and cannot be roused. Lessing, busy as he is, is not himself. I have come to a conclusion that may strike you as a little wild. Quite unconsciously to both the tie has, I think, become so strong that they cannot live apart. Felix is as much a portion of it as Meg. Lessing is like the tenderest woman in his affectional nature, and these eight years of care and work for the two have made him practically a father, and — I had almost said — a husband."

"You cannot mean that he loves Meg?" Mrs. Herndon said hastily.

"I mean nothing but that they are essential to each other, and cannot thrive apart. He would start if told he loved her; and she simply worships him afar off, in equal unconsciousness. I would guarantee that love in any ordinary sense has never been thought of by either. It is simply a case of entire adaptation; and though marriage may never be thought of, if this brute were out of the way it might be the best thing that could happen for both. Foxgrove is the place for all of them; and until Miss Erminia is reconstructed, Deepmouth must be counted out. I blundered more than you, but I find it always hard to accept the fact that for some natures change is out of the question. You look as if you were writing me down for a gossip."

"Do I? Then my face does not tell the truth. I am only wondering at the way you sense things.

You know secrets better than the holders of them. I wish — "

The words had been involuntary, and she colored high for a moment. Dr. Strothers had risen, and his eyes were fixed on her face; but as he saw the sudden flush, he turned away, talked lightly for a moment, and then said good-by, lingering as he walked, and thinking of various looks and little words that in the last month or so had begun to take coherent form in his mind.

"They call that woman a sphinx," he thought, as he entered his own door, "yet she is transparent as air, — so transparent that for those who cannot use their eyes it is all the same as opaqueness. But I wonder just what she meant to-day. There is something waiting for me there, and when it will be given — who knows? She will tell me in time — I wonder when, and if it will prove to be the fancy I have had."

Dr. Strothers leaned back in the chair into which he had thrown himself, and frowned, as he thought, so darkly that the man who presently opened the door started back as he saw his face.

"It's the same woman that came yesterday," he said apologetically; and Dr. Strothers sprang up, and, with a shake of the head, entered the waiting-room, and in a moment was lost in professional questions and examination.

XVII.

"THE change has done Meg no good," Mrs. Herndon wrote, a few days later, "and my coming makes no difference. I reproach myself that I did not realize more fully how deep a hold this terror of Gid had taken of her. I am inclined to think your conclusions may have been incorrect, and that it is fear, almost to the point of mania, that will kill her, if something is not done at once. Use money freely as is necessary if it will do any good. To persuade the man to leave the country would be the best thing; but use any means that occur to you as reasonable."

Dr. Strothers shook his head as he read. "She does not know how impossible I find it to get hold of the fellow," he thought; "but I will try again this evening. If he eludes me again, I can fall back on the Mission, and have another look at that wonderful Jerry. These reformed men are generally frauds, consciously or unconsciously; but if half the stories his people tell are true, he is an apostle, and all the better one that he has first lain in the gutter, and knows what he is talking about. But I must get at this Gid. Poor Meg! It's a strange turn matters have taken with her."

Gid, in the mean time, had lost no particle of the resentment, the dull fury, that had filled him as he made his way home after the encounter with Miss Biggs. To have burned the shop and every one in it would have been a delight; but if he came into the

hands of the law, it must be for larger crime than this, — something that would not be reckoned as crime at all. For days afterward he hung about the region, watching the comings and goings, till baffled by the closing of the shop and the news, obtained from the deeply interested barkeeper, that Lessing and all of them were off on a lark in the country. Gid ground his teeth as he listened.

"Off with the man that's stolen her from me," he muttered; "and me working and saving for her, and ready to have made a lady of her!"

He had brooded over it all till at last he seemed to himself wronged and outraged beyond the lot of common men. His own infidelities and brutality had sunk out of sight. He had a right to her and to the child, and he would make short work of any one who hindered him from claiming it. He muttered to himself as he stood behind the bar, and the young barkeeper watched him furtively as he poured down glass after glass of vile brandy.

"He 's in for the jim-jams," he said, confidentially, to one and another; "and, for my part, I 'll be glad when he begins, for then it 'll be plain sailing. He did n't use to take much, but he drinks now like a fish, and there 's no knowing what he 'll do before he 's floored, and we can lock him up for a while, till he straightens out."

"You 'd better keep out of his way," he had said to Dr. Strothers on the last evening that he had asked for Gid. "I don't know your business, but it ain't healthy for any one just now to ask him more questions than has to be."

"I am a doctor, and I want to talk with him about a patient of mine that he knows," said Dr. Strothers. "Here is my card, and I wish he would come up to my office this evening."

"I guess you 'd wish he was out of it before he 'd

been there many minutes," the barkeeper answered, after a long look at the speaker. "But I'll tell him. You need n't be surprised if he don't show up."

A week had gone by, and, in the pressure of work, the thought of Gid had slipped out of sight, till Mrs. Herndon's note revived it, and he determined to find him if it required the entire night to accomplish it. To make some sort of terms at once was a necessity, and he would try and persuade the fellow to go home with him, and talk over things quietly. He had already feed the barkeeper heavily, and thus secured all the co-operation that was possible ; but even young Harrigan's confidence was not strong enough to make him face Gid, in his present mood, more than the exigencies of work required. He nodded confidentially as Dr. Strothers came in, and pointed back with his thumb.

"He 's in there," he said, "but he 's chock-full. I would n't meddle with him. You will ? Well, we 'll have an ear open, but you 've got to look out for yourself."

Gid looked up silently as Dr. Strothers opened the door, and walked up to the table where he sat in the small inner room, usually given up to the more exclusive customers who wanted a whole bottle with a friend. A pack of cards and a "Police Gazette" were on the table, and the air reeked with the fumes of liquor and stale tobacco. Gid eyed the intruder for a moment silently. His first inclination had been to spring to the stairs at the back and escape ; but he was heavy with liquor, and his feet for the first time seemed to refuse to carry him. Dr. Strothers looked at him quietly, and Gid collected himself and tried to think if he had ever seen him before. He swore under his breath as the face danced before him, and became two, three, then a dozen faces ; then looked steadily, till once more they settled into one.

with eyes that searched him till he shook himself uneasily.

"That Harrigan ought to be discharged," he said. "I'll give him his walking ticket in the morning, letting in Tom, Dick, and Harry, and never a word to me. What do you want?"

"I want to give you the chance to make a little money," Dr. Strothers said.

Gid eyed him suspiciously.

"And who's going to be so generous all of a sudden? What's it for?" he asked, after a pause.

"A little bargain I want you to make."

"Well?"

"There is a woman who is nothing to you, but who is afraid of you. I want to know what you will take to let her alone. Understand, I know the whole story from the first day down. The law will free her, and you have not the shadow of a chance against it, but it will not free her from the chance of your following her up."

Gid's small eyes gleamed with rage.

"So that's what you're after!" he cried. "I thought it was something to do with her,— the she-devil. Well, you'll find for once that money don't count. The law may do what it likes. I know the law, and you can't scare me. She's afraid, is she? I'll make her more afraid before I'm done with her!" And Gid broke into a torrent of oaths as he struck the table before him.

Dr. Strothers looked at him. It was impossible to know what course was best with this wild animal, evidently drinking himself to death, yet who might live long enough to cost the life of one who must be saved if possible. He took out a pocket-book and laid on the table a package of crisp notes, fifties and hundreds, for which he had cashed a check that afternoon.

"That has n't a bad look," he said; "you can do a good deal with a package like that. The five hundred is yours, clean, if you will agree never to go near Meg again, and will make an affidavit that you won't."

For an instant Gid looked longingly at the money. The spendthrift season had passed with him, and his father's miserliness was beginning to assert itself. But whoever was willing to offer five hundred to keep him out of the way would probably offer twice that. His look wavered and travelled to Dr. Strothers's face.

"It ain't the Dutchman that 's trying to buy me off. He 's got no money," he said with a snarl. "Who is it?"

"That has nothing to do with the question."

"You 'll find it has if you try to deal with me," Gid said with a scowl. "I ain't so easy to be bought as you think. Meg 's played fast and loose as she liked. I 've rights, and she knows it. The boy 's mine, and I can take him wherever I find him. That 's law, and I stick by law."

His eyes were on the notes as he spoke, but the half-dull, half-malicious obstinacy that was his characteristic expression had settled down. Dr. Strothers sat silent, waiting to see if the money would not prove a more powerful argument than words, but Gid made no further sign. He had lighted a cigar, but after the first whiff or two put it down, and half rose.

"I 'll think about your terms when you 're ready to tell who makes them," he said.

"There is no special reason why you should not know," Dr. Strothers answered. "It is a lady who knew Meg when she was a child, and who wants to have her live. Meg is dying. She will die very soon, and you will have gained nothing, unless she can know that you will keep out of her way. Now, what do you say?"

Gid had straightened himself again, and sat con-

sidering the matter. The "lady" was a lie, of course. Some lover of Meg's wanted her to live, and would chuckle over the easy way he had been bought off. The Dutchman was the man to be dealt with; shot like a dog if he ever got the chance at them together; but a girl like Meg would have more than one lover. Dozens had made up to her when she lived down in the ward, and she had laughed at them all. She took things differently now, but the time had n't come for lovers to fall off. This man could hardly be one; yet why not? Meg was off with the Dutchman, but that made little difference. There would not be such interest from any one who did not expect to make something by it. Calm and indifferent as he seemed, sitting there and eying him as if he were an animal in a cage, it must be so. These highflyers all looked that way. The very brassiness of it all was what they thought would humbug him, coming here and facing him down with high words and a pocketful of money. He had meant to wait and be certain, but here the man was, — put straight in his way, and sitting there like a fool. His hand crept stealthily to his pistol pocket, then moved away. He wished that he knew certainly, for it would be a bad job to make a mistake. He shut his eyes as again the face multiplied and danced about him, with other faces that mocked and jeered and seemed to urge him on. Why did n't the man go? He had better if he wanted to save his neck. When he could make out which face was really his, he would take aim at this fool who was looking now at the floor, and seemed to think everything was all right. Gid laughed aloud, and the sound rang in his ears and seemed to echo about the room. It was long before it died away and the faces disappeared with it, and again he saw plainly. His eyes were half shut. To Dr. Strothers, unconscious of how his mind had worked, and thinking of him

only as a half-drunken but still shrewd wretch, meaning to drive the sharpest possible bargain, there was no apprehension. If delay were his method, delay it should be. He had looked up at the laugh, and seen that the expression had altered, and that he looked decidedly much more disposed to make terms. Perhaps even a less amount would have brought the same result, and he wished that he knew better how to deal with such a subject. Gid rose slowly to his feet.

"I think we can fix it first-rate," he said with a curious smile.

Dr. Strothers looked at him intently. There was a sudden sharp click, a flash, a report; then another; and Gid, as he saw his enemy fall back, gave a shout of delight, and sprang through the door at the back, and from there to the street. The men had rushed in from the saloon, to find Dr. Strothers wiping the blood from the cut made by the ball as it passed and buried itself in the wall, the second one having glanced aside and gone through the door. For a moment he had been stunned, but rose up now very pale, but otherwise quite himself.

"Did n't I tell you so!" the barkeeper cried, making a pounce upon the money, and slipping it into a pocket as the men crowded around. "You 'd no business to face him when he 's been ugly enough to shoot a regiment for a week and over. Now see what you 've done. Here 's the cops in on us, and a nice mess of it!"

A policeman or two had appeared, and looked interestedly at Dr. Strothers. It might be somebody from the Mission, a little more foolhardy than usual; and they had learned to respect the work which in the end saved them considerable trouble. Harrigan himself made the charge, as Dr. Strothers washed away the blood, with an inward shudder as he reflected how nearly the ball had done its work.

"Gid 's out of his head," Harrigan said. "If you can catch him he 'll be better locked up than anywheres. He 's set out to drink all the liquor in the ward dry, and he 's catching up with it."

"You 'll have to come round to the station," one of the policemen said, civilly enough; and Dr. Strothers followed him up Cherry Street, having first taken the package which was presumed to have fallen from his pocket, and at which his guide shook his head.

"You 'd ought to know better than to be walking round the Fourth Ward with a pile like that about you," he said. "Now, here you are, and here 's the captain."

"The man is drunk, and irresponsible," Dr. Strothers said, after answering a question or two. "I am a physician, and had some questions to ask about a woman, a patient of mine whom he knew; and he took the opportunity to fire at me."

"Then you knew him well?"

"I had never seen him till to-night," Dr. Strothers said, wishing some way of escape might open, and determined not to give any portion of the interview unless necessary. The sight of a bank-note acted magically. The questions were few; and after his address had been taken, he was told that nothing would come of it, probably, unless he wished to enter complaint.

"I do not, most certainly," he said, and hurried away. A little plaster on the cut had stopped the bleeding; and as he just missed an up train at the Franklin Square station, he walked on toward Fulton Street, blessing the nature of the locality that reporters seldom invaded. He had heard a cry of "Fire!" from Roosevelt Street, and paused for a moment as he heard the bell and the heavy gallop of the horses from the nearest engine-house. The street had filled instantly, not only from the people

crowded on door-steps or on the stairs for a breath of air, but swarming out from unexpected holes and corners; and they pressed to the edge of the walk as the magnificent horses flew toward them. A man had stepped out from an alley-way, and stood stupidly almost in their track. A shout went up as he did not move.

"Look out there! Don't you see what's coming? Look out!"

The horses swerved slightly as he suddenly tried to regain the walk. There was an instant in which the lookers-on thought that he had, and a breath of relief, then another cry as they saw what lay there, when the way was once more clear.

"He suicided!" "He did n't!" "They knocked him down and did for him!" "He 's done for, anyway, whether he meant it or not."

Dr. Strothers had sprung forward as the engine passed, the man at the back dropping off and running up to the prostrate figure, from which he turned after a moment's look.

"Mashed pretty flat," he said indifferently. "The old gal's unlucky. This is the third man she 's run down."

"He is not dead," Dr. Strothers said, after a moment's examination. "Here, some of you men! Lift him carefully to this shutter, and we 'll carry him in here."

He had caught a shutter leaning against the side of a wretched grocery; and now all made way as the insensible burden was carried into a room no less wretched, and laid on the pile of rags and straw that did duty for a bed. A woman brought water in a tin pail; and as they washed away the blood and dirt from the crushed face, Dr. Strothers started involuntarily.

"You know him," the woman said, with a shrewd

look. "I would n't have sint him out o' the wurruld this way, but it's small sorrow for any of us that he 's lavin' it. He was a hard one, Gid was, an' he 's been the devil's own too long not to have him waitin' for him when he 's well over."

"Shame to ye for a heart of stone!" another woman said. "'T won't ind the saloon, his dyin', an' it 's always a worse one that comes. Shure, it 'll take more 'n brandy to bring him round."

"Sind for the praste," another said, as Dr. Strothers put a spoonful of brandy between his lips.

"The praste! What 'd he be doin' wid a praste, the bloody Protestant? He 's past prayin' for. Whist! There comes the turncoat."

The crowd parted, and McAuley's tall figure appeared in the doorway.

"Poor soul!" he said, as he looked at him. "I thought maybe there was life enough in him for a word, an' I ran when they told me he was run over an' in here. He 's comin' to. There may be a chance yet."

Gid had opened his eyes, and looked around.

"What 's this pack here for?" he said. "What 's up?"

"He 's himself to the ind," the woman said who held the basin. "You 'd think he 'd be in distress enough to spake aisy."

"His back is broken," Dr. Strothers said. "He does not suffer. He has only rallied for a moment."

"What?" Gid said. He had caught the words. "You think you 've finished me, but you don't know as much as you think. Take me out of this hole, and I shall do well enough."

"Poor, sinful soul!" McAuley said, dropping on his knees by the bed. "Your time 's over. Oh, Jesus, open his eyes an' let him see, if it 's only for a minute!"

"It's useless, Jerry," Dr. Strothers said. "Let him die easy."

"It's no more useless with him than it was with the thief on the cross," McAuley said earnestly. "If he's sense enough to know us, he's sense enough to say he repents, an' to turn to Christ. Gideon Lee, it's never too late for a soul on earth, but it will be too late in a minute. Think, man, what you've done, an' pray while you can."

Gid's eyes were fixed on Dr. Strothers's face, but the dull hate that had filled them was gone. He smiled for a moment, and his look wandered.

"We'll go up to the pasture," he said. "The raspberries are thick as you ever saw, at the stone wall."

"Gid, think about your soul," McAuley cried again. "O Lord, wake him up, if it's only for a minute."

"Wake," Gid repeated; and as he spoke the gray shadow settled on his face. "Don't bother me, mother. I'm saying them — 'If I should die before I wake' — "

The voice died away; there was a moment's movement, and then no longer need to ask if all was over.

"He has gone to his own place," McAuley said solemnly. "The Lord have mercy on his sinful soul."

The women had dropped on their knees and were praying, and a policeman ordered every one out till the coroner should come. Dr. Strothers was deadly pale, and leaned heavily on McAuley's arm as he went toward the station.

"You're all done up. I wish you'd come into the Mission a bit, till you're steadier," Jerry said, with an anxious look; "or if you won't, I'll go on up with you."

"There 's no need. I shall be all right in a few minutes," Dr. Strothers said. "Such an evening as this would make any man a little shaky."

He had recovered himself as he spoke; but his step lagged as he went up to the station, and Jerry kept near him till he had seen him safely seated in the train.

"It 's a warnin' that the Lord grant he may heed!" he said, as the train moved away. "The Lord 's back of it somehow, sure, else him there would n't be doin' his work, an' never thinkin' but it 's all out of his own head. But whin they 're doin' it that way, out of themselves like, it 's a pretty good sign they 're comin' to the time when they 'll go on a bit further an' open their eyes to see that it 's for him, an' that they 'll not be let go till they 've settled that they 're willin' it shall stay for him."

Dr. Strothers left the train at Fourteenth Street, and walked slowly over to Second Avenue. The house was closed, and it was a piece of folly to walk by it; still greater folly to cross to the nearly deserted Park and sit there looking at it in a sort of stupor. How near death he had been! nearer than any one should know, now, or perhaps at any other time. It was best that the house was empty. He was weak — almost babyish. To know that he could enter, and tell the story, and see the sympathy in the clear eyes into which, even now, he almost seemed to look, would be a piece of recklessness. It was best, best for every reason, that he could not; but the fact was no less strong that he longed for it, and that the time was coming when he should speak. For Meg at last the way was clear. He would telegraph in the early morning, and write later. Was there any block in his own way, or was the fancy that had crossed his mind more than once less a fancy than he had thought?

"When the year has gone," he said at last, half aloud, — "when the year has gone, she must know; and till then, be reasonable, dear boy."

He smiled as he spoke. It was a familiar form of words that had come to him, — words spoken often by Uncle Hartley in that impetuous youth, which still burned under the quiet exterior he had learned to wear. "Be reasonable, dear boy," he repeated, and made his way home.

The night had not been free from disturbances of lesser magnitude at Deepmouth. Mrs. Herndon had said quietly to the cousins that Meg must be moved to Foxgrove, and had faced the torrent of expostulation, reproach, and entreaty poured out by Miss Erminia, who, finding her inflexible, burst into tears and fled to her room.

"It 's best; I know it is best," Miss Marcia said sadly, "but I 'm sorry that Erminia takes it so."

There were tears in Margaret's eyes as she kissed her and went slowly up the stairs. Miss Marcia had aged perceptibly; and Margaret reproached herself as she watched her, then followed, pausing for a moment at Meg's door. It was partly open. A dim light burned within, and Meg leaned against the pillows, her face, so long clouded and sad, bright with something almost like joy.

"What is it?" Mrs. Herndon said, for the moment startled into the fear that the end had suddenly come. "Dear Meg, what is it?"

"I thought you could tell me, perhaps," Meg said, as she put out her hand. "Has n't something happened? Is n't something going to be different?"

"I am going to take you away with me, Meg; that is all."

"There must be something more," Meg said. "It came a little while ago. It was all so heavy and dark when I came up here. I said I could n't live

much longer, and why must it take so long to die? And then, all at once, there was a change. I can breathe. It does not ache so, and I am almost happy again. Is that the way it gets when you are really almost dead? I don't believe now that I shall die. What *is* it?"

Mrs. Herndon looked at her anxiously. It was surely not the face of a dying woman. New life looked out from the beautiful eyes, and her own hope rose.

"I will sit here awhile," she said. "If you sleep, Meg, you may be better still in the morning."

Meg put her lips to the hand she held, then settled back in her pillows and closed her eyes; and Margaret stayed there quietly till the steady breathing told her that sleep had come. Her own spirits rose. Whatever the cause might be, Meg should believe it what she would; and she went to her own room, cheered by the intangible something that had suddenly lifted the cloud. She woke early, to find the sunshine pouring in, and a light breeze bearing with it the scent of the mignonette under the window. She dressed quietly, stole down the stairs, and, opening the door softly, went out to the old garden, picking some currants as she came to the bushes, and remembering doing the same thing in the same way in that first happy visit. A boy came up the street, drawing a stick along the palings and whistling "In the Sweet By and By." He opened the gate, and Margaret went forward with a sudden terror as she saw an ominous yellow envelope in his hand. She tore it open and read: —

"Gideon Lee died last night, and Meg is free. Will write later."

"It came in just as the night man was goin' home," the boy said, with an interested look as her pale face

flushed with sudden relief, "an' he sent me along flyin'. I ain't the reg'lar boy."

"Wait a moment," Mrs. Herndon said, as she felt in her pocket for the missing purse, and then ran in for the dollar at which the boy's eyes opened to their widest.

"It 's paid for," he said; "it 's marked paid, you see. 'T ain't worth more 'n five cents to come up here."

"I see; but this is for yourself," she answered; and the boy looked at it for a moment, then thrust it deep into his pocket, nodded his thanks, and sped down the street jubilant over his unexpected wealth. Margaret looked after him with a smile, then sat down for a moment on the steps.

"Meg knew," she said to herself; "but how did she know? I wonder if the same relief is there this morning?"

She crept up to Meg's door, and looked in to find her still sleeping quietly; and she slept on hour after hour. Felix stole down and ate his breakfast with a happier face than he had worn for days, and the household moved on tiptoe. It was nearly noon before she finally roused; and Mrs. Herndon, who had been watching for any sound of movement, came in.

"Something has happened; it is in your face," Meg said instantly. "It must be good."

"It is good, Meg," Mrs. Herndon said, after an instant's hesitation. "It sounds hard to say it, but no greater good could come to you."

"Then he is dead," Meg said, after an instant of awed silence. "Oh, I knew it, and yet I could hardly believe it could be he and not me. Always, every minute since that day in the Park when he took hold of me, I felt him ready to spring, like a cat on a mouse; I watched a mouse, the other day, so nearly away — so almost safe, and then the claws on it, and

I said, 'That's you, Meg, and there's no chance for you.' And now —" She was silent again, and shut her eyes. When she opened them, tears were running down her face.

"I did not think I should be sorry for him," she said; "but I am, all at once, and that is very strange. I think I would even have gone to him if he had wanted me to. Did he?"

"I don't know, Meg. I only know that he is gone. Dr. Strothers sent a telegram, and he will write soon and tell more."

"I don't want to know any more," Meg said, after another pause. "I think I had rather not. I want to go home again. May I, soon?"

"Very soon, if you will get strong fast enough. Miss Biggs is coming this afternoon; and to-morrow, if you are as well as to-day, you shall go to Foxgrove and stay for a while. Lessing wants to go home, too. I had a letter from him this morning. He is better, and says that now Miss Biggs will take care of the children, and he must get back to his work. Drink this beef tea before you try to get up, and don't hurry."

"I am stronger," Meg said. "My feet feel like moving. I want to see Felix."

The boy was in the room as she spoke, and in a moment had his arms about her neck, the new look in her face as plain to him as it had been to Mrs. Herndon. She left them together. Better days were beginning for both. Better days might be on the way for all. She sang softly as she moved about her room, till silenced suddenly by Miss Erminia, who appeared on the threshold, her handkerchief at her eyes.

"I would n't have believed you so heartless, Margaret," she said reproachfully. "It 's actually dancing for joy to get rid of us. It is n't decent, really."

She retreated hastily, as Miss Marcia opened her door, and closed her own with a decisive bang. Even the morning's news had not been sufficient to dispel her sulks, although she had been told as soon as she appeared; and she remained close prisoner till late afternoon, freshly indignant at the unexpected arrival of Miss Biggs, but, happily for the family peace, concentrating her indignation on her. Miss Biggs had come directly from Foxgrove, and thus knew nothing of the sudden relief brought to all; and she shook her head mysteriously as she read the telegram, declining to believe till she had held it in her own hand.

"I knew there was a spell on her," she said. "Oh, you need n't tell me! There 's things you can't cipher out by rules, an' I 've seen 'em. An' the way a shif'less, good-for-nothin', mis'able cuss 'll eat the heart out of a woman — yes, an' sometimes 't ain't women alone that has it happen so. I've seen men put through sech things, — men that was half women, an' so some feelin' an' chance in 'em to suffer. An' 't ain't always the right one dies — not by consid'able. Amanda 's seen more 'n it 's worth while to tell, an' some things that would n't be believed if she did tell. I believe in possession, that 's what I believe in, — same as it was in the days when devils was cast out in Judæa. We ain't so much further ahead but what the devils can do pretty lively work when they 're a mind to, an' mostly it takes death to cast 'em out, — the biggest kind of a blessin' if folks choose to look at it that way. Now we 'll see what we will see."

The journey, though a severe one for Meg, was borne far better than expected; and as at evening the next day the carriage entered the long avenue of lindens and elms, she looked out eagerly. Lessing was by the piazza, the children looking around curiously from the side; and Felix precipitated himself from

the carriage, not waiting for it to stop, and threw himself into his arms, clinging there till Lessing had kissed him more than once. Meg's eyes were shining as he helped her from the carriage, shocked as he saw how she had wasted.

"Don't look at me that way," she said. "I have begun to get well. I feel well, but it does n't show yet."

She held his hand, and for a moment pressed it to her cheek as she spoke, her face full of joy. His own had flushed; and he looked at her, half unconscious of the groups about him. Felix caught his hand, and jumped about him as he stood; and Miss Biggs hurried Meg to her room, nodding with satisfaction as she went.

"Folks would say it was all wrong, I suppose," she said, as she finally left Meg in order for the night; "but I say it 's all right, an' the nat'ral endin' for a good piece o' work, well begun, an' wantin' just that for a cap-sheaf. Keep still, Amanda, an' don't you put your hand out to push. Things 'll push o' themselves if you 'll only let 'em alone in the right place."

XVIII.

"I WANT you to go to Newport, child, without any further delay, and I shall come and go as I can. At present it will not be very often; but there is the usual set, Sally, and you won't mind."

Mrs. Longshore's face clouded instantly.

"Bert, I shall begin to hate even Margaret, if these vile people are always to spoil everything I want to do. If you won't come as usual, I don't think I care to go at all."

"My dear Sally!"

"No, not at all. Why should I, and have everybody smiling and sneering because, at last, your devotion has cooled off? That horrid Mrs. Beckwith, that always said, 'Just wait, my dear, and you'll find he has n't any more hold-fast in him than the rest of the men,'—I know how she 'll look and whisper. It 's just as I thought it would be. You 're so stirred up about the rights of these miserable wretches, that have n't more than half a soul, that you forget that I have any at all."

"It can't be this is the same girl that promised, only a week ago, that she would help all she could," Mr. Longshore said, after a perplexed pause, in which he had moved his chair nearer and Mrs. Longshore had resolutely pushed hers away.

"I don't think I've ever broken my word yet, Bert. I said I would help, and I will, anything in reason. I will give money or old clothes or cold pieces, but I won't give *you*. We 've always done everything together ever since we were married, and

I won't give up and let all your thoughts be spent on creatures you had never seen nor heard of a month ago. And after they treated you so, too! It's very poor-spirited. It's downright cowardice, — that 's what it is!"

"Try and look at it reasonably, Sally. Think how I've let everything go all my life, and how much lost time there is to make up!"

"Nobody else suddenly goes off into schemes. Margaret, of course — Margaret's a widow, and she can't drive fast horses or own a yacht, and she always was crotchety, anyway, and of course she just plunges into philanthropy. You could leave all you want to do with her, Bert, — with her, and that crazy German, and Dr. Strothers, who is almost as bad as both of them. Margaret would love it. Do, do, *do*, Bert!"

Mrs. Longshore flew over to the arm of his chair, and took his face between her hands. "When I love you so, Bert, how can you sit there so obstinate? Say you will go with me to-morrow."

"For your sake I wish I could, Sally; but I have settled to see the contractors, and I must be on hand for a dozen different things. If it were a question of making money instead of spending it, would you be quite as reluctant to have me delay?"

"It 's a very impertinent question; but I suppose it is only the beginning of the kind of things you 'll say more and more of as you go on. I know just how it will be. You 'll not only smell a little worse every day, — you do, Bert; I knew just where you 'd been when you came in last night, — but you 'll go further and further down every day you associate with such people. Miss Biggs is just as bad as the rest. She ought to be shut up in a lunatic asylum. And you 'll get further and further away, and all at once I sha'n't have any husband at all. Oh, Bert, Bert! how can you!"

For the third time that day Mrs. Longshore burst into tears, and threw herself down by a chair. In the first two Mr. Longshore had coaxed and petted and patted till the shower passed, but now he sat silent and grave till his wife faced about and looked at him with flashing eyes.

"I told you so. I knew it would turn you into a brute. You don't care how much I suffer, and I wish I was dead."

"Sally!" Mr. Longshore said, so sternly that she started; "this has gone quite far enough. I must do what is right, whether you oppose me or not. Sit down here and listen, and for God's sake, use your reason! I thought you were generous and unselfish. Don't let me lose faith in you. I want my wife to be my helper, not my hinderer. It can't be possible you care so much for your own pleasure that you would prevent my doing what it is an undying disgrace to me that I did not try to do ten years ago."

"I heard you say yourself, Bert, the week of the Pittsburg riots, that every mother's son of them deserved hanging."

"I was right and I was wrong. The men who did the final mischief were criminals, drawn in from the worst sources, and deserving punishment. The men who began it did not wish to destroy. They wanted justice. Capital had crushed them. They had the right to protest."

Mr. Longshore smiled faintly as he spoke the words.

"It is quite as amazing to myself as it is to you, Sally, to find how my mind is working. I'm not a Socialist or an Internationalist, and don't mean to be. But my eyes are open. There are some rights for the worker that I have never dreamed of. The men who make the foundation of our fortunes deserve protection and some chance to further their

own. I can't touch the mass. I won't even think about them; but I will think about my own, and, from this time on, see that such justice as I can understand is done them."

"They got on well enough before. Why can't they get on now?" said Mrs. Longshore, after a sulky pause.

"Did they? Here is a letter Delaplaine gave me yesterday, just to illustrate how things have gone for the firemen on the Lake Shore Road."

"And why should I have to hear a fireman's letter, — a man you would not allow in the house? I think you have lost your senses, Bert."

"I want you to see how hard things are for them, Sally. Can't you listen, for the sake of having a little better understanding of what their life really is?"

"They're used to it. Why should you suddenly start up and want to know all the horrid little details? I never thought you had so much curiosity, Bert."

"Curiosity! Good Heavens, Sally! Do you call it curiosity because I want to know whether a man can keep soul and body together on the wages paid him? This man is intelligent. He tells a straight story. Do listen."

"Well, go on," Mrs. Longshore said, shrugging her shoulders.

"It is written from Buffalo, and this is what he says," Mr. Longshore began, after a troubled look at his wife's face. "'After the last cut down, we firemen received one dollar and forty-six cents for running one hundred miles, and our division is eighty-eight miles long. Now, supposing we start out of here early in the morning. We get our breakfast here, which costs twenty-five cents. At Dunkirk we dine, which costs twenty-five cents more, and on arriving at Erie we have supper, costing twenty-five

cents more; our lodging also costing twenty-five cents, making one dollar in all. So that here alone we have forty-six cents left. Now, if we were able to run all the time, and make all the trips possible, we would clear, above board, about twelve dollars a month. From this comes washing and other incidentals. This is only a bare statement, when in reality there are hundreds of cases where the men fall below many a month. A month ago a test was made by an unmarried fireman, who was well known for his economical habits. Well, he ran as often as he could, and made many extra trips, and had an unusually good month. It was found at the end of the month that he owed fifty cents. I suppose you think, like all other people, that we are a fierce set of fellows, anxious to burn and smash things, — a set of lions going about seeing what they can devour. But all of our men, excepting a few who are under the influence of liquor, have decided to be quiet, and make no violent demonstrations whatever. The iron workers speak in much the same way. They are patient, and only want justice.' "

"I don't believe a fireman wrote it or could," Mrs. Longshore said obstinately. "It 's too well expressed. And I don't see any use in your reading it, anyway. You don't own railroads. You have n't anything to do with firemen."

"No, but I wanted you to know how little they have to live on, Sally. It 's because I 've been a stockbroker and nothing else till these factories came into my hands, that I have never thought about wages; but I 'm coming to the conclusion that instead of discharging men and docking the wages of the rest, it 's rather my business to take more on."

Mr. Longshore brightened as his wife looked at him attentively. It was a little hard on her, perhaps, to find his interest suddenly diverted; and he

would be as considerate as possible, and bring her by degrees to his new standpoint.

"I did something yesterday that I want to tell you about," he said, with a slight hesitation. "I 'll wait and do it some other time, if you like better."

"No, go on," Mrs. Longshore answered.

"I went into that first house next the factory, where I had seen a respectable, nice kind of a woman the day I came to grief. Sparks has the entire management of the factory, and times were so bad he lowered the wages a month ago, as he had authority to do. The men had earned fourteen or fifteen dollars a week, and he had cut wages twice, till he had them down to seven and a half, and the men glad of work even at that. I looked at this woman that day, — a patient, quiet-looking creature, with five children, and all in one room. I made up my mind I would ask her how she managed to live, and so I went up there yesterday afternoon. She looked at me as if she thought I was a policeman in disguise, but I said to her at once, —

"'If you 'll tell me exactly how things are, I think I can help you all. I want to know what can be done with a dollar a day.'

"'I know better what can't be done with it,' she said, with a watery sort of smile, after a long look, in which she seemed to make up her mind that I was honest. 'Everything 's run down and coming to pieces. We were both brought up well, and I know how to manage; and even when Tom lost his trade, because of some new machinery, and had to take what he could get, we had some comfort. But you look at it now. It 's a dollar a day. There 's three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, but take out Sundays and holidays, and there 's three hundred and eleven dollars left. I 've calculated it up and down, and in and out, and all ways, till I can say it backward.

The rent's four dollars a month, and cheap, they say, even for this poison-hole; so that brings it down to two hundred and sixty-three. Then the coal. It was fifteen dollars last year; and by the bucket, the way we must buy, it can't be less than twelve, this. The water-tax is four dollars. That leaves sixty-seven and a half cents a day for seven people; for you know, sir, children eat more than we grown-up folks, — sixty-seven and a half cents a day for the three meals they must have. But that's not counting clothes. That's what staggered me in the beginning; for I got it all figured out, — how much hominy, and meal, and all the rest I could get for the money, — and all at once it came over me, like death, You have n't even thought of the clothes! There's Tom. He's got to go decent, if he wants work. He's got to have coat and pants and shoes, for he's in rags. The five must have something spent on 'em: for shoes a dollar apiece, anyway. There's twelve for Tom, and five for shoes, and five for me, — for I'm in rags, too, — and ten for them; thirty-two, all told, and that brings us down to fifty-five cents a day for the meals. And that's if we have good luck, and I can get better, and care for them all with no break-down. There is n't one cent for doctor or anything that may come.'

"Till that minute, Sally, she had talked on in a hard, steady kind of a voice, just calculating on her fingers, as it were, those dollars she had to deal with. I choked, too, when she broke down. She'd put her knobby, hard-worked hands up to her face, and I looked at them. Not much like your hands, Sally, or mine. The children began to cry, too, and she stopped and hushed them. One of them had pretty, soft brown eyes, and helped hush the little one, — the oldest of them not over nine. 'Oh, sir,' the mother said, 'I ask your pardon; but it's hard, when

you 've tried all your life, to find all at once it 's no use and you can't stay respectable, no matter how you try. And it 's easier for me, that had a good bringing up, and know how to manage, easier a deal than it is for many a one here that don't know how to make the most of anything. But the men won't stand it. They can't. Why should they when they 're the ones that make the money, and then go half-fed and half-clothed? Don't mind me, sir. You don't look like one that would let them suffer, or anybody.'

"I gave her some money for the children's shoes, and I left an order at the grocery round the corner for enough to keep them going a month: but it was n't charity; it was a debt, and I owed it to every soul in that house that has been in the factory. Sally, you are just as troubled over them as I am. You want me to do the right thing?"

Mr. Longshore's voice had grown more and more appealing, as an inscrutable something in his wife's manner warned him that he was not producing the impression he had hoped for.

"What do you call the right thing?"

"As far as I can see, Sally, — and it is my own sense, and not an opinion I have asked or read, — as far as I can see, if there is reduction of expenses anywhere, it should fall on me rather than on them. I don't for one instant say that I have n't a full right to everything I own. This business of equal division is nonsense, for men have got to be fit to own money before it should come to them. But how can they save on starvation wages? How can they be anything but brutes? I owe them decent homes, — a fair equivalent for the rent they pay. I owe them wages enough to give them some chance to rise. I owe more than that, it seems to me, though I have not settled it exactly yet in my own mind. But it looks —

it certainly looks as if I owed them some share in the profits they make. Sally, I never talked business, you know. Whether it got tangled, or was a straight skein, I dropped it at the door, and took all the good times that came. And I'll take them still, we'll both take them, if I can know that I am not crushing out the life from men and women and children whose work makes it possible for me to have them."

He stopped and looked anxiously toward his wife. She had kept her eyes fixed on his, but her face had seemed to harden as he spoke. The childish look that even at almost thirty was her distinguishing expression was gone; and from the eyes, till now laughing and careless, a hard determination gleamed, — a look her mother's had worn at times, but that he had deemed quite impossible for the daughter.

"You can't think that I mean to deprive you of anything, my darling," he said. "I would rather you had more than less. But I want you to be just with me. I want you to understand."

"I understand perfectly well, Bert. If you had failed, or lost a great deal, I'd go into a little house. I'd do anything you wanted. But when it's only that you've been imposed upon by a lying woman — Oh, you need n't speak! Have n't I heard ma, over and over again, tell what frauds they were, and how a man would even be laid out in a coffin, and everybody crying around him when she went in to investigate a case, and then sit up and laugh before she was fairly down the stairs? I know more than you think I do. Margaret is imposed upon every day of her life, and you are going to be as silly as she is. I don't say there is n't suffering, but there are plenty of institutions for every kind of case. At first I thought it was all very lovely and sweet, and Margaret a kind of angel. Now I think she behaves ridiculously, and you are just as bad. As long as I

thought it would pass, I cuddled you and comforted you all I could. You were good enough for me or anybody; but now, if you keep on this way, you 're just spoiled, and we never shall have any comfort together again. I think all you have been talking about is nonsense, and I never want to hear another word about it. You can go to Newport or not, just as you please, but I shall know what to think if you don't go."

Mr. Longshore sat silent as she ended, a look of astounded bewilderment on his face. It had never occurred to him to question what his wife's underlying traits might be. He had taken her love for Margaret as the indication of any loyalty under adverse circumstances, any self-sacrifice that might be demanded. She loved him. He could not doubt that for an instant; for had she not clung to him from the beginning, and petted him even more devotedly than he had petted her? It could not be selfishness; she had never had an ungratified wish. It could not be jealousy; and yet what else could account for it? Jealousy at any diversion of his attention; fear that the new interests might weaken the tie between them? She must know how impossible this was. Could she doubt it? His voice trembled as he spoke at last, —

"Sally, you have hurt me so I hardly know how to answer you. Now, let us try and understand one another. Can't you believe that if I want to be a better man I want that you should be a better woman? I love you exactly the same, but won't you go on with me?"

"I won't go anywhere that just takes you up against a dead wall," said Mrs. Longshore, positively. "It 's no use arguing, Bert. I think you are behaving dreadfully, and, till you come to your senses, I don't want to say another word about it."

"You 'll drive me distracted, Sally, if you go on this way."

"I thought that would come next. Of course, now, it will be I who do all the distracting, and you 'll never think again what sort of an effect you are producing. I never thought I could say such a thing, but you make me wish I had never seen Margaret Herndon. If you 'd only seen her in time, you could have married her instead of me, and saved a great deal of trouble."

"This is mere vulgar contention," said Mr. Longshore, hotly. "I am ashamed of you, Sally, and I do you the justice of believing that you will soon be ashamed of yourself."

Mrs. Longshore's sole answer was another indignant burst of tears as she left the room. The horses had been brought round, and pawed impatiently before the door. He hesitated a moment, then rang the bell.

"Tell your mistress the carriage is waiting," he said, as the man appeared, and then stood looking out on the Avenue.

"She 's a headache, sir, and won't go this afternoon," Parker said, returning in a few moments, and privately wondering over his master's disturbed face.

"Even turtle-doves ain't beyond a little peck at one another," he said to himself as he watched Mr. Longshore drive away. "But I've been in this house three year, an' never see sign of it before. Well, well! who'd 'a' thought they 'd ever come to it?"

Two Southern friends had been invited to dine, and Mrs. Longshore entered the library just before dinner in the wildest of spirits, and arrayed for conquest. Never since she had ceased to be Sally Hobbs had she flirted with such evident enjoyment of her power, and the two gentlemen followed her sallies with fascinated attention.

"They sha'n't think I don't approve of anything she chooses to do," Mr. Longshore said resolutely to himself, after the first astonished observation of her mood; and he held to his purpose so successfully that even his wife was deceived, and made more and more strenuous efforts to induce some sign of disapprobation. She looked mutinously toward her husband as their guests at last said good-evening, exchanging various views on the extraordinary characteristics of women as they sauntered down to their hotel; but Mr. Longshore made no comment. This was a woman's fashion of working off a stormy mood, and the ferment might settle and leave something more like his own than the afternoon had given. But the morning showed no change. He was treated with punctilious politeness, but nothing more. Mrs. Longshore asked the news and chatted on so long as Parker remained in the room, but fell into silence when he had left it.

"We may as well say good-by now," she said, as they rose from the most uncomfortable meal they had ever shared. "Parker got the tickets yesterday, and there will be no occasion for your coming up."

In spite of herself her eyes filled with tears as she spoke, and her husband moved involuntarily toward her.

"Dear," he said, "let it all drop here. How is it possible that there should be dissension between you and me?"

"Will you give up too? Will you promise me you won't sell yourself to these people? Will you come with me, Bert?"

The tears were running down her cheeks. She had never looked more lovely or more appealing, and Mr. Longshore took her into his arms and held her silently for a moment.

"Will you?" she repeated.

"I can't break my word, Sally. You don't want me to."

"You gave me your word first. You promised, nine years ago, 'till death us do part,' and now you let anybody and anything come between us. Take care, or I shall begin to hate you, perhaps."

Mr. Longshore turned away with a groan, as she disengaged herself, and flew from the room just in time to escape Parker, who entered silently, and stood dumb with surprise as he saw his master's distressed face. Something unaccountable and dreadful must be going on. Perhaps Mr. Longshore had failed, and was breaking the news. Parker retreated to the butler's pantry, and remained in melancholy hiding till the front door closed, and Mr. Longshore took his way down town, repressing his impulse to go round at once for Margaret, and beg her to straighten matters. He had thought he understood women. He would have sworn that no man knew them better. Yet his own wife was suddenly a stranger to him; and who knew what extraordinary trait might leap into sight even with Margaret, were she tried suddenly? He had meant to go home to lunch, but remained down town, meeting the contractors who were to talk over the possibilities of reconstructing the Nineteenth Street houses, and forgetting much of his unhappiness as he talked. It was three o'clock before the interview ended; and he hurried home, to find that half a dozen were in the parlors, and no private word with Sally possible.

"Oh, Mr. Longshore!" twittered his special abhorrence, Mabel Black; "we're all going together, you know, and we thought it would be so much more of a lark to come round here for lunch, and have the carriages take us up at half-past four. Sally has made us all nearly die of laughing. I do think she gets funnier every day."

"She certainly does," Mr. Longshore said, with more emphasis than he intended. Miss Black looked at him through her half-shut eyes, light and cold as her unpleasant face. Something was wrong, and she would find out what as soon as possible.

"I wonder if there's going to be a smash," she thought, with the same suspicion that had come to Parker. "Sally is trying to cover up something. Goodness! What a commotion it would make if he really should fail! If Sally should have to give up her jewels, I might get that set of cat's eyes at a bargain."

Mr. Longshore went to the boat, looked into the staterooms to see that all was comfortable, and then watched eagerly for any sign of relenting from his wife. None came, even when the bell rang, and every one hurried ashore. He lingered for a moment. She had turned her face as he kissed her, so that his lips just brushed her cheek; and as he sprang into the carriage, and closed the door, his eyes filled with tears.

"I'm more of a woman than she is," he said, a little bitterly. "It feels as if I were in a sort of nightmare. Well, we'll work it out as we can. I always said that if any sort of misunderstanding came between us, I'd never go to outsiders for advice. She'll see clearer when she is further away, and be the first one to tell me so, and laugh at herself for having been so foolish."

Mr. Longshore was sanguine by temperament, and had soon argued himself into quiet. But he was also sensitive, and at moments saw again the hard look in his wife's eyes that had so confounded him, and that came suddenly between him and all plans. He was restless and moody in spite of himself; drank more claret than was good for him at the Club dinner, which he elected as more social than his own deserted

dining-room; and fell into hot discussion with Mr. J. B. P. H. Hurst, who had recently become a member, and, with the added importance of this fact, was a little more insufferable than usual. The two very nearly quarrelled; and Mr. Longshore, indignant that he had been led into the discussion, and amazed at his sudden want of equanimity, went home disgusted, to a restless night and an uncomfortable waking.

With morning his spirits had returned. It was impossible that matters should not be better, and he ate his breakfast with good appetite, and went down to business. His own want of tact had probably been to blame. If he had first asked Sally if she remembered the description he had given her of the two houses, and then showed her the plan by which he proposed to alter them, — the two plans, indeed; one hingeing on old Jessop's consent to treat two houses that backed them in the same way, — of course she would have been interested, and perhaps pleased. He would try and have more common sense when they talked again. In the mean time old Jessop was to be seen at one; and he despatched his letters, and fanned a little as the hot air steamed up from the swarming street, and, a few minutes before one, walked leisurely down a dozen numbers, to find the old broker bland but inflexible, — the blandness for Mr. Longshore's millions, the inflexibility as to his helping to spend either them or his own.

"The houses have been inspected and pronounced in good living condition," he said. "These are not the times for any more outlay than is absolutely essential. No, my dear sir. Your plans do you credit, but they are utopian, — utopian, sir."

"In other words, you won't," Mr. Longshore said at last, disgustedly, as each argument met the same reply. Mr. Jessop smiled.

"When you have reached my age, sir, you will not

use negatives. Affirmatives sometimes do the work as well. I don't propose to help you make ducks and drakes of your money, and I do propose to keep my own and get as much more as I can."

"The true broker would be ready to make ducks and drakes of anybody's money so long as his own commission was secure," a voice said in the doorway. The bell had been touched but a moment before as Mr. Longshore rose; and Mr. Savage Logan stood ready to take his place, his lips smiling, but his eyes alert and taking in every detail, — their "thin, clear, gray hold" piercing disguises and seeing to the heart of more mysteries than his lips ever told. He made no comment as Mr. Longshore bowed slightly and passed out; nor did he question as the old broker lay back in his chair and shook silently.

"Saul among the prophets!" he said at last, recovering himself. "You would n't have expected Longshore to be trying philanthropic experiments. I shall be on the lookout after this. There 's a screw loose. Longshore and model tenements! It 's a good joke."

"Some of Mrs. Herndon's work, probably," Mr. Logan said, with a thin smile. "Her own money is running in the same direction, I believe."

"A man 's a fool that gives a woman such a chance," said the broker, judicially. "Now, Logan, what can I do for you?"

Mr. Longshore pursued his way up town, hotter with indignation than even the mercury warranted; and as he went a suggestion occurred. The last transaction in real estate had brought him a piece of property so absolutely unavailable that he had not even sent an agent to look at it. Fifteen miles out on Long Island was much the same as owning land in Oregon or Patagonia; and when such land held chiefly cedars and thistles, with a rickety grist-mill by way

of improvements, it was clearly loss of time to even think of it as property. Stay! Nesbitt had mentioned something else in his letter, but that was down nearer the village; a small mill, its owner nearly bankrupt from mad experiments of one sort and another, but the work going on on half-time, for the benefit of his creditors, of whom he himself appeared at present to be chief. He would look at both. Half the day still remained; and as everything had elected to cross his wishes, he would try horses rather than men, and see what virtue lay in plank roads and the swift, eager trot of the span. The moon was at the full. He would drive out early, view the land, and return by Snedecor's, where supper would reward him for any evil heat or mosquitoes had wrought; and perhaps on the way he should think of some method by which Sally might be brought to hear reason, and Jessop circumvented, and the crooked in general made straight.

He wished it were to-morrow, for morning would probably give him a letter from Sally, to whom he had already written a few lines. He had always written daily when they were apart; and though there had been a certain constraint in to-day's note, he would not allow any feeling to alter the habit. Hope asserted itself again; and he entered so nearly his usual buoyant self that Parker smiled with delight, and then frowned as he reflected that more trouble might be waiting in the reception-room.

"There 's a man that I could n't turn away nohow," he said. "He 's just come, and said it was life and death, and you would n't mind when you knew."

Mr. Longshore stepped hastily into the reception-room and faced the intruder.

"I never do business at home," he began; then stopped short, with a puzzled look creeping over his face.

"Lennox?" he said slowly. "It can't be Frank Lennox. By George! I believe it is. Give an account of yourself, my boy!"

He had sprung forward and taken the outstretched hand so heartily that the pale face flushed and the voice shook a little as the stranger said, —

"I didn't expect to be remembered, Bert. It is only to-day that I have found out just how my affairs stand. I went to your office, and you were gone, and then I hurried up here on the chance of catching you, not certain you were my old schoolmate, but still thinking you must be. Can you give me half an hour?"

"Ten if you want them. Would it do as well if we took some of them behind my horses?"

"All of them if you like. I only want to tell a story, and then I must go home."

"Where is home?"

"East Domingo, fifteen miles out on Long Island."

"That's curious," said Mr. Longshore. "I was starting for that very point. There's a small mill there I want to have a look at."

"Have a look first at the unlucky wretch who has been trying to run it."

"You don't mean it, Lennox?" Mr. Longshore said in amazement. "Then you can tell me all about it. I thought you were in California somewhere. It's most extraordinary you should turn up on the very spot I was going to. Here, Parker, some lemonade, and ring for the horses. I'll be down again in a moment, Lennox. Lean back and rest. You're done up with the heat."

"Is it hot?" the stranger said absently. He was looking about the room and taking in the tokens of wealth on every side. The flush of pleasure had faded; and the thin, eager face, with its sensitive mouth and large blue eyes, was haggard and drawn.

In spite of full brown beard it was a boyish face still; and the tall, slight figure held small promise of enduring vitality. He leaned back and closed his eyes, and Mr. Longshore shook his head slightly as he stood silently in the door and looked at him.

"He is pretty well down hill," he said to himself, with a sudden change of plan. "Here, Parker; I won't have the horses till half-past three. Lennox, we'll do part of our talking here. Come into the library, and there nobody can interrupt. Now let me have the whole of it, from A to ampersand, as your grandfather used to say when we came up for confession. Give the story, and then we'll plan as we go."

XIX.

MR. LONGSHORE'S face had settled into the expression of quiet but shrewd attention that had often established the confidence of uncertain investors. Lennox looked at him seriously as he seated himself.

"It 's a long story," he said, "and it is plain to see by my general make-up that it does not end well."

"Go on," Mr. Longshore said. "We may see a way to make it end better. The whole of it, mind."

"It 's short enough up to the last five years," Lennox said, leaning forward, with a long breath. "You kept track of me, it seems, up to the California episode. Well, I came back from there. Never quite took to the life, but I finished my law studies in my uncle's office in Baltimore. There the row began. He had charge of the fifteen thousand my grandfather left me, and that I was not to touch till I was twenty-five, and in the mean time I rubbed along on the little income that Jack and I had to divide between us. I don't know just how it came, but out in San Francisco I had met a man who upset all my old theories. I did n't adopt his, but I came to some new conclusions. In short, I began to feel that our whole system of work and wages was wrong. My aunt's brother was a manufacturer; and I went among the men, an honest, fairly intelligent set, and tried to get at them and understand them. At last they used to come to my office, — I had one by that time, — and we tried to get to the bottom of things. We

talked back and forth squarely. I got the Cobden pamphlets and the answers to them, and the answers to the answers, and you 'd be amazed at the shrewdness and real common-sense the men showed. I 'd watched processes more or less; you know I was always jamming my fingers and blowing myself up with inventions when we were boys, and there was one mill that at last I could n't keep away from, I was so certain an improvement could be made in one point in particular. The foreman was one of my best men, and one evening he came before the others. 'I 've watched you,' he said. 'I believe you 're hitting on the same thing I 've been on, and I 'm a mind to let you into a secret.'

"It 's a secret still, Bert, but we 'd both had the same notion, and I saw a fortune ahead. I told him so. I said I had n't much capital, but I 'd agree to take what I had, and we 'd go somewhere near New York. Domingo naturally was the place; for I had been fond of it when I was a boy, and it was secluded enough for experiment, yet near enough to avoid heavy freight and so on.

"Well, we went there. My uncle was furious; but he had been furious for some time, — called me a socialist and a fool in general, and washed his hands of me. I married the girl I wanted, and not his selection; and that was bad for his temper too. He 's a good man as far as he goes; but money means more than anything else, and Nelly was a Maine schoolteacher, and not a dollar except what she had earned, and he would n't look at her. We went to Domingo. I had theories, as I have still, about how I should deal with my men. Ten went with me from Baltimore, and the rest I picked up here and there. I made over a mill that had been started and run down years before, and brushed up a little a dozen or so houses for the hands that went with it. The first

year was prosperous. I paid my men good wages, and I gave them a small percentage over on the profits, — not much, for I was in debt and wanted to get straight with the world. Then Coxe, the man who is manufacturing the same thing, made up his mind to either buy me out or ruin me. The first he could n't; I had a good thing, and knew it. But all has gone against me. I 've had to pay cash where other men had credit, and fight combinations and monopolies till I was heart-sick and purse-empty. My men have stood by me, but it has been worse and worse for them. I had only thousands, where millions were against me. This secret process lessens the cost, and makes production easier; and Dan Murray is as obstinate as I. He will not give up; and if we are sold out that is one thing that they won't get. But this is how it is to-day. The mill was attached a week ago, and this morning I found that you held the mortgage. We have lived, Nelly and I, right among the workmen, and had chills and fever straight ahead because I had no money for drainage. I knew what to do. I meant to have a model village, and I 've got one that a rag-picker would disown. And yet I believe I can go on if you are willing to give me a little time. You shall see the papers. I 'm not a rascal, as they 're disposed to make out. There is a chance there, not only for good work, but for justice. I wanted to prove that the system that has worked with Godin could work with us. It would if I had had more capital. I am ready to fight still; but I can't fight if I 'm pinned to the ground, and knocked flat every time I get up. I 've told it poorly; you 'd better look at the papers. See, even last year I could have cleared handsomely, but these men agreed to undersell, — to waive their own profits for the sake of crushing me. Small concerns everywhere are being wiped out; only the big ones stand the

least chance; yet mine could live if it were known that capital were backing it. Don't be afraid; I sha'n't ask you. All I want of you is to hold off, — not to sell me out till I've had a little longer chance. They've advertised it for next week, — Friday. Bert, I would n't mind half as much if it were n't for Nelly. Plucky? There never was a woman born that had the faith in a man she has in me. She's been strength and courage through everything, even when the baby died and the typhoid took off a dozen of our people. They're our people through it all, though they have to live in any way they can. Times are hard and wages low; but somehow the most of them hang on, and seem to expect I shall pull them through. We're all on short commons together. The papers? Here they are. They're plain enough. But I see easily that you don't take much stock in it. I'm not disappointed; I mean, I did n't suppose you would."

He turned and looked fixedly out of the window, his face working under the brown beard, and his hands clenched as he ended and sat silent.

"Then you supposed wrong," said Mr. Longshore, quietly. Lennox started violently and faced him. "You might have known, Frank, that if you needed anything from me you'd get it, if it was within reason. Keep quiet now, and let me go over these papers; only just understand that you won't stay in this box any longer than it takes me to get you out. Nonsense, boy! Don't be a woman!" he added, as Lennox brushed away the tears and at last turned his face to the chair, making vain efforts to repress his emotion.

"I'm a little used up," he said presently. "This last week has been tough. God bless you, Longshore! I believe I can pull through, after all."

There was a long silence as Mr. Longshore went

rapidly through the papers, pausing now and then for thought, and watched eagerly by the young man, whose face had suddenly lost the deep depression it had worn, and was eager and glowing with hope. Mr. Longshore flushed as he went on, and set his lips firmly; then, as he threw aside the last one with something that sounded very like an oath, rose and held out his hand.

"Frank, we can pull together, I believe," he said. "I'm a capitalist, it's true, but I'm a partially converted one. To the day of my death, so far as I can see my way, I will own nothing that has not had a righteous portion divided with the men who have earned it. I think you are right, and that there is money in your undertaking. We'll make the fight together; and if it comes to the point where it is best to stop, there shall be no loss for you or your men. I want to see the place. A notion has come to me. There's time enough still, and here are the horses. I'll drive you home, and we'll dine on the way, and talk as we go. I've a story, too; but it's a mean one, — no such flavor as yours."

Parker chuckled as his master ran whistling up the stairs, and chuckled again as he saw him spring into the light buggy.

"It's all right this time," he said, as they drove away. "That young man's brought good luck, no matter how he looked when he first came in; but I've had one good scare, to think what might 'a' happened."

Lennox was silent as they made their way toward the ferry, watching his friend's face, and evidently studying over the unexpected aspect of things.

"People live and die in these frightful rows of houses, and very good people too, I don't doubt; but I'm not sure but that I'd rather take Hoboken. Greater chance for variety, at any rate," Mr. Longshore said, as he left the Grand Street Ferry behind,

and then, by slow degrees, the depressing outskirts of Williamsburg, the impatient horses checked to the decorous speed of the three funeral processions on the road to Cypress Hills. At last there was open country, and the long stretch of plank road; and he braced himself as the pull began, to end only at the toll-gate. Hot, certainly, but a fresh breeze blowing, the silver maples showing all their wealth, the poplars in green avenues before the old manor-houses, — the English with tall pillars from ground floor to roof; the Dutch, low and broad, hip-roofed and dormer-windowed; sycamores here and there in the front yards, and over all the cloudless blue. To the toll-gate the drive was for the horses, who should have as sharp a run as they pleased; but, once passed, he took a side road, familiar to his boyhood, lined with blue-green cedars, over which the cat-brier and wild grapevines climbed, and bitter-sweet made ready for the fall glory. Thus far few words had been exchanged. Lennox seemed content to enjoy the unaccustomed luxury, and to rest, as he had not rested in months, in the certainty that the compact and determined figure at his side meant help, and help more practical than his wildest imagination had dreamed. For Longshore, his own trouble had sunk out of sight, and he enjoyed almost as heartily as if Sally had been by him. At Snedecor's they paused long enough for a light dinner, both being too eager for the end of the journey to waste time on a more elaborate one.

"It is weeks since I have known or cared what I was eating," Lennox said, as they went out together to the long piazza and waited till the horses were brought up. "I was shaky enough an hour ago, but this has set me up marvellously. A quiet mind is the best appetizer, and I wish Nelly knew this minute, poor girl!"

He sank into silence again as they took their places in the buggy, and, once more leaving the high-road, drove on toward the town; but roused as his friend talked on, at first bits of reminiscence, then the story of the mental revolution that had come to him.

Wheat-fields, green and silent, were on either hand, waves of shadow sweeping over them as the light wind came and went. Here and there the tall corn rustled and tossed its plumes, and at intervals came market-gardens, and the lines of pea and berry pickers. The horses felt the loosened rein, and trotted quietly, with an occasional look backward at the busy talkers. Mr. Longshore had told his story, ending with his usual comment.

"It has a rascally sound, Lennox, but I 'm only half a rascal. The curious thing is that it should be so clear to me now where I have failed and what I must do, when up to the time that avenging demon descended upon me I had absolutely never thought of the thing five minutes. And if I can't comprehend the speed of my own change of base, of course it 's nonsense to expect that Sally should."

He checked himself suddenly, and turned away.

"The crows are at their old tricks," he said. "Do you remember their town-meetings, Frank, and how we used to hide in the cedars and watch their manners and customs? They are exactly the same. I 'd wager that that old fellow laying down the law is the identical one we 've fired at. Why did we fire? Where does this instinct to kill come from?"

"Part of the passion for domination that is born in every man," Lennox said. "It will end by and by, when we have learned a few of the first principles of living. We 're in the alphabet, Bert, — not a step further, and I wonder the great Schoolmaster has half the patience that is shown. And we chuckle when

we get to words of one syllable, as if we were sages. It 's only when we can really read the story that we suddenly know ourselves very small children in the primary class, whose chief business is not to tread on the other children's toes, and to go shares in the dinner if they have n't brought enough."

As he spoke they came suddenly upon the old town, well-nigh hidden in trees; and Mr. Longshore laughed as he wondered what affinity the railroad and the gas-works and other tokens of modern innovation had with the low, hip-roofed houses, covered with scalloped shingles, the remnant of Dutch æstheticism. Modern advance in taste was represented by sundry square villas in the outskirts, crowned with cupolas and rejoicing in great store of jig-saw ornamentation. Then came Liberia, a strange colony of Africans, recruited from many sources, the aristocratic element being the houses of old family servants scattered about the neighborhood. Beyond it lay the East Village; and now Lennox looked about eagerly, and began to point out localities. The mill spoke for itself, — a square, two-story wooden building, with smoke-pipe at one side, and the steady beat of a steam-engine plain to be heard.

"It 's after hours, of course," Lennox said; "but Dan does what he pleases there."

There were a score of small houses, all neat, and many with gardens about them; and beyond the cluster of older ones, which made up the village, a manor-house, every board in which must have creaked with dismay at the indignities put upon it. Old hats stopped gaps in window-panes, the clumps of box held strange rags of clothing, goats browsed under the sycamores, and ill-kept dogs rushed out to bark at the unusual apparition.

"Don't make me responsible for that horror," Lennox said, as Mr. Longshore looked inquiringly at the

building. "It is Nelly's despair, but it's better than it was. They are railroad men chiefly, diggers and so on, — the poorest class of Irish, and inconceivably stupid and suspicious; but some of the women are improving. The trouble here is that this ground is all old and pretty well exhausted, and it is saturated with poison that could perfectly well be eliminated if I had any money to use. There is every condition of health here, — light soil, good water, every chance for health if we could start right: but that old house is a fever-nest: the drain practically emptying into the well, for it is not six feet away, and the people crowding because they like to be together. You 've got to allow for that instinct of massing. Even in the single houses they like the door to stand open, so that not only the passer-by but the hens and the pig may walk in for a friendly interview. The Anglo-Saxon locks his door. The Celt would never shut it, unless compelled. Now, here is our house," he added, as they came to one a short distance from the group, and with a great sycamore at the side. "A little cleaner, — that 's the chief difference. And here 's Nelly." He sprang from the wagon, and kissed her as he spoke. "Nelly, go on your knees with me to this deliverer. We're not to be sold out. It 's Longshore himself."

Mr. Longshore flushed deeply.

"That 's quite enough," he said hastily, as he saw the look of sharp anxiety give place to a relief so sudden that she trembled and caught her husband's arm.

"I 'm a fool, as usual, Nelly," Lennox said remorsefully. "It 's all right, and I could n't wait to have you know that this was n't a myrmidon of the law, but a friend."

"She will have plenty of opportunity to make up her own mind, without instructions," Mr. Longshore

said, with a keen look at the delicate face, the resolute, patient mouth, and wide, clear gray eyes, that met his, after the first moment of trouble, with a calmness that showed well where Lennox had found large measure of his strength.

"It is rather nonsensical to come out at sunset for a tour of investigation, but this is only preliminary," he went on, as he bowed low over the hand she had put out. "We do not mean to waste any time, and when I have looked through the mill I shall come back for an hour's talk before I start back."

"There 's a box of a spare room," Lennox began.

"No, thanks ; not this time, though I shall be very glad another," Mr. Longshore said heartily, as he looked with friendly eyes on the pair. "Margaret would take to them on the spot," he said to himself. "She must know them as fast as possible. Now, Lennox," he added, "time 's short. Let me see what I can."

He was silent as he followed his guide, looking keenly at every part of the works, and listening to Lennox's explanations of this or that deficiency.

"The heaviest order we ever had came in a month ago," he said ; "and here it lies, unfilled. There is n't a dealer that sees our goods but that knows on the spot they are a little beyond anything that has been done. This process of Dan's not only saves two of the customary operations, but it gives a firmer quality. From a pail to a car-wheel, supposing we could arrive at the turning out of car-wheels, the work is as perfect as machinery can make it. It begins with the pulp. There 's no adulteration there, Longshore It 's perfect work from the first rag to the last coat of varnish, and the men are as proud of this as I am."

"How do you pack ?"

"The New York orders need next to no packing, —

no boxing, that is. For others, I have boxes sent out by the car-load."

"Why don't you make them here, and save freight?"

"I would, but there is no building. It's one of the things I want to do. We ought to make this a self-supporting community, practically, and employ our own carpenters, and workers in general. That's what I meant to come to, but it has had to wait. I leased the mill and the land; but the old fellow that owns it all would sell cheap for cash, if he had the chance. He has watched me like a lynx, to see how things are going."

"I'll tell you what I'm thinking of," Mr. Longshore said, after a silence, in which he walked out to the door of the mill and once more surveyed the scene. "Come over to the house. I want your wife to hear."

Lennox flushed with pleasure.

"I wish you knew what a wonderful woman she is," he said, with a little laugh. "She is so silent you would n't find it out in one visit or many, but I know. I want to see your wife, Longshore. You look like a happy man, and you deserve to be."

"People always like her," Mr. Longshore said, after an instant's imperceptible hesitation. "Here comes Mrs. Lennox, and it's so nearly time to go back that I must not waste words. You will think me too fast, perhaps; but I have about settled what I shall do, unless it proves more impracticable than it looks. I have just come to the consciousness of what one piece of property belonging to me means. It is a packing-box factory on the lower floor, and above are paper boxes, and a floor given to shirt-making. The workers in the box-factory, most of them, seem to live in two houses, also mine, that I want to make over if I could, but am doubtful

about. The girls and women are scattered about the neighborhood. In fact, I don't know anything about them, save that yesterday I went over a list of the wages paid, and began to speculate as to how they kept body and soul together. I had said then that I should like to make a clean sweep of the whole thing, but I had a plan that I thought would work. I believed Jessop would see that it would be to his interest to go in with me, and let us reconstruct the abominations we have been asking rent for. He does n't agree with me. Now, what do you think of moving the whole thing out here? They won't all come, but a good many would; and the same money would go just about twice as far in building up the village and doing what Frank wants. Would it work?"

Lennox rose up with a bound from the chair into which he had dropped as they entered the little parlor, into which the moonlight streamed. Sunshine would have shown worn carpet, and a shabbiness only held in check by exquisite neatness; but the kindlier moon made no disclosures, and touched tenderly the small ornaments, — the little bookcase, the baby's picture in the corner, and the steady face of the mother, whose eyes had turned to it for a moment as they sat down.

"It 's salvation for every one concerned, if you can bring it about, Longshore," Lennox said, almost with a gasp. "Life will be worth double. Do it if you can."

"I shall want no end of help from both of you if it is to be done," Mr. Longshore said, as he put out both hands impulsively, to find them taken by husband and wife, who looked at him as if vowing themselves to all that the new alliance might bring.

"Help?" Lennox repeated. "I think every angel in heaven will help if we can even begin to do what I see! But Bert, with all your power, you 'll find

that more than money is wanted. You must have a patience and faith as nearly infinite as man's can be; and if the creatures fret you, disappoint you through and through, go on all the same. And they will not, all of them. Oh, there are hearts of gold! Only you must not go into it unwarned."

"I 'm not. I 've thought out a good many sides of it, and I shall see more as we go on," Mr. Longshore said. "Now I must say good-night, but I shall want to see you to-morrow, Lennox. Suppose both of you come in and dine and spend the night. My wife is in Newport; but Parker is a host, and you will be comfortable. Then we can talk."

"Frank will go, and some other time I shall be glad to," Mrs. Lennox said; and Mr. Longshore, who had wished to urge the plan, was silent as a look in her face told him there was some reason for the refusal. Dan had brought round the horses, and stood there petting them as Mr. Longshore sprang into the buggy.

"I wish I had you both for the ride in," he said, as he turned. "We shall spin all the way. It 's a heavenly night. Good-night."

"Is it six hours or six thousand years since two o'clock this afternoon?" said Lennox, as he went in, and, when the door was shut, took his wife into his arms, and for a moment stood with bowed head. "Nelly, the turn has come. I think we shall live to see the dream a fact."

"A heavenly night," Longshore repeated as the town was left behind, and the eager horses flew over the silent country. His thought turned to Sally, as the stillness made itself felt more and more,—a silence that held peace and a sense of presence so strong that for a moment he bared his head and looked up. "If I believed such things, I should say that my mother herself was by me this minute, just as I

seemed to feel her when the baby died," he said, half aloud. "Why not? Her own mind worked, I know, as mine has suddenly begun to do. How do I know but that she has helped it on? And if she has, perhaps Sally can be influenced too. There 'll be a letter in the morning. Poor Sally!"

He fell into troubled thought again as the city outskirts were reached, and he passed through the squalor and wretchedness hardly less evident by night than by day. And though the first moment of waking brought the sense of happy anticipation, it was clouded instantly by the doubt and perplexity hedging about every thought of Sally. He wrote her again, a page or so, before going down to the breakfast-room, telling her of his drive with the friend whose name she knew as one of his old schoolfellows, but resisting the temptation to say more. It was useless to talk of plans or hopes while she was in this antagonistic state, yet the impulse to do so was almost overpowering. The bell rang as he sat looking at the paper, and he went down to be met by Dr. Strothers in the hall, who, as he laid down his hat, said, —

"You like the unexpected, Longshore, and you have asked me up to breakfast so often that of course you are prepared for a sudden acceptance."

"There are only one or two people in the world I should be as glad to see," Mr. Longshore said, so heartily that Dr. Strothers shook hands again. Longshore was developing very curiously. There was fine stuff here; and perhaps what he had railed against as mere veneering was, after all, honest polish, that did the delicate grain of the wood good rather than harm. He was a society man, and he lived up to the best ideal of a society man. His mission might be a gradual reconstruction of his fellows, who would listen to him when an outsider could get no hearing. His face seemed to have taken on new character; but

Dr. Strothers's quick eyes saw the underlying disturbance, and wondered for a moment if he dreaded the new path he had chosen to tread.

"I want you to take an afternoon, Strothers — the first one you can spare; why can't it be to-morrow? — and drive out with me to East Domingo," he said, as breakfast began, and he sugared his berries. "You must hear all about this new find, and then tell me what you think. You're not in a hurry now, are you?"

"It's quarter of nine, and I am to be back at ten unless something happens, in which case my boy will come up for me. I should like to know just what you have been doing."

"You're going to, you may depend, — every word of it," his host said, with a laugh. "Business I always put aside out of hours. You never heard me talk shop. But everything else I'm as bad as a woman about. I want to talk it all over, and see how it sounds. — Letters, Parker? You may bring them here. — Pardon, a moment, Strothers."

He had turned over the envelopes eagerly, and flushed with disappointment as he saw that none of them bore the Newport postmark. But he comforted himself in a moment. Sally had, of course, sent the letter to the office, and he should find it waiting there; and he made haste to bury all apprehension in the satisfaction of describing the pair in their tumble-down village, surrounded by underpaid workmen and suspicious and disdainful farmers and market-gardeners.

"I suppose there is no more intense Toryism on the face of the earth than you will find in that conservative little town," he said. "They have fought against everything modern for two hundred years. I was at school there, you know, when I was a boy, and came to understand it pretty well, and, of course,

Frank and his wife must seem a pair of lunatics. I want to tell Margaret about them, Strothers. By the way, she has gone, I suppose? I'm glad she has, but I want to tell her all about it even more than I wanted to tell you."

"Lessing will rejoice in knowing any such attempt has been made," Dr. Strothers said; "and if I tell him the present prospect, I sha'n't be able to keep him in the country a week longer. Meg can't come till she is better, and in the mean time Lessing is needed more and more."

"Why?"

"Because there is more and more dissatisfaction among the men he deals with. I saw Heilbrun last evening, and he was triumphant over the prospect of various strikes that are threatened, and as to which Lessing would have more influence than anybody else. But it's a Chinese puzzle, and this time a man and not, as usual, a woman at the core. He has broken down from sheer worry over Meg, who in turn is half dead with worry over Felix, and this Gid has been the fly in the ointment. Poor wretch! You must hear the whole story. Never mind the mixed metaphors. I want Lessing back again as soon as practicable. Things look black. I wish a few more capitalists would open their eyes. You'll be a first-class missionary, Longshore."

"If yesterday is a specimen, there won't be any immediate pressure of converts," Mr. Longshore said, as they rose from the table. "That smug old fox of a Jessop is a type of the most of them; I'm not sure, however, but that his refusal is best for my plans in the long run. Let me drive you down. No? Well, then, come up again. Come often as you will. You do a fellow good."

The coupé was at the door, and he pushed the morning mail into his coat-pocket, and ran it over as

they rattled down town. A pile of letters lay on his desk, and he turned them over eagerly. Not one from Sally! and he sat back in his chair, too bitterly disappointed for a moment to think of business, then set his lips in resolute putting aside of his own thoughts, and till one o'clock went through every detail as it came up. He read over then his morning letter, and added, after a little thought: —

"You have hurt me quite as much as you could wish, perhaps more than you would wish, by your silence. Don't go on so, my darling, unless you mean to spoil something very precious, but believe still in

"Your devoted BERT."

"I suppose it 's a poor-spirited way of taking things," he said, as he sealed it and sent it out. "But I want to be patient. I will be patient, and she must see by and by. What is it, Jones?"

There had been the sound of excited voices outside, but this was no unusual occurrence; and he looked up quietly, to see Smith, the general manager of the factory, standing in the door, angry and fierce.

"They 're the devil's own match for cussedness," he said, coming forward excitedly. "I don't believe there 's their equal for unreasonableness in the whole city. And to up and strike when we 're pressed with work, and canning-time just beginning!"

"Who has struck?" Mr. Longshore said.

"Your own men, — the box men, that have fared no worse than any of the rest. I told them yesterday times were hard, and there had got to be another reduction, and I did n't like the look of things then. They were sulky, and would n't speak; and that 's a bad sign. It 's got out that you 're the owner, and they 're bound to see you. I came down soon as they struck. They stopped off at noon, and ate their

dinners quiet enough; and then Sandy McCullum came forward and said they 'd done all they were going to till they had heard what you had to say to them. I 'd advise your leaving for Newport this afternoon. I 'll manage the dogs better if they know you are gone. Three of them are coming down here; they 're on the way now, and the rest are waiting there for the word they 'll bring back. I would n't see 'em, sir. They 're a bad set."

"You did not understand, then, what I told you the other day," Mr. Longshore said. "You were to make no further reduction without consulting me."

"Partridge made another cut yesterday. They knew they 'd have to take their turn, too," Smith said, after a moment of embarrassment. "You 've never interfered before, and I supposed you 'd want to do as the rest do, same as usual. No offence, sir, I hope?" as something in Mr. Longshore's look seemed to promise unexpected trouble.

"You may go for the present," his employer said, after a pause. "I shall be at the factory about four, perhaps earlier."

"I would n't give in," Smith began.

"That will do. I settle my own affairs," Mr. Longshore said, with an ominous flash of his blue eyes; and Smith made haste to escape, muttering as he went, —

"That 's the thanks a man gets that 's slaved to make the most he could for somebody else. I 'm a fool, and he 's another; but he 's the biggest."

XX.

A FRESH pile of letters lay on Mr. Longshore's desk, and he turned them over hastily as Smith left the room. It was not the right hour; but some chance might have delayed delivery, and a word from Sally show itself even now. But the familiar square envelope, with its elaborate monogram, failed to appear, and for a moment he threw himself back in his chair wondering if anything would be gained by yielding the point and going on at once. This sort of thing was intolerable, yet what could he do? For Sally's sake, as well as his own, he must not yield. Somehow she must begin to learn that principles were one thing and preferences another, and that if she had heretofore known only the latter, it was high time for both to make the acquaintance of the former. He turned resolutely to his mail, answered the more important letters, made such notes on the remainder as were necessary for the use of his clerk; and as the bells of old Trinity struck the half-hour between three and four, walked up Wall Street and toward Vesey. He had given no thought to what he should say; and when he had entered an Eighth Avenue car, he still found himself unable to think what was best.

The day was close and hot, and the dark cloud settling down in the west brought no sense of coolness. The car was full, and he looked at the steaming occupants with the new sense that seemed to have been born with the new conditions he had suddenly found imposed upon him. He smiled as he was roused from

an involuntary speculation as to the probable fortunes of a shabby but well-brushed man at his side, who leaned back as if the ride meant an unaccustomed luxury. The long route had never seemed so hopelessly squalid and forlorn. In fact, he had small knowledge of this region, and looked out with reflective eyes, wondering if anything could redeem it from the atmosphere about every dingy brick and low doorway. He was lost in speculation as he left the car and walked slowly down to the factory, where Smith met him with a lowering brow.

"The men are to meet you here at four-thirty, sharp," he said. "They wanted to talk over things a bit with their egger-on, and you 'll find them a cursed unreasonable set."

"Shall I?" Mr. Longshore said indifferently. He went in and sat down on a box near a pile of shavings. The saw was silent; but the clean, fresh smell of the pine filled the air, and was a relief after the gutters he had passed. Smith had followed him in from the little office, but retreated after a word or two, muttering as he went. Something was up, and queer doings might be expected.

Mr. Longshore sat quietly on the box, and looked about, — his first real observation of his property.

"I should n't mind knowing the trade myself," he thought. "There is a good smell, and it is clean. Wood seems to be about as decent a thing to handle as there is."

He picked up a shaving as he waited, and twisted it about his fingers. He remembered that Frank Lennox, when they were boys, had haunted the carpenter's shop in Domingo, and begged that he might learn, and old Brinkerhoff had frowned at the suggestion.

"A gentleman never handles tools save as an amusement, sir," he had said; and as Frank returned,

"Then I suppose Jesus Christ could n't have been a gentleman," glared at him for a moment, and then led him away by the ear for condign punishment. Frank had held to his early faith. His life meant something. Perhaps if his wife were against him, it would mean less. What were the old words? "A man's foes shall be they of his own household"? Sally a foe? It could never be. The bad dream would end — must end — or he should be tempted to fall back. No; impossible! Never again in the old ways. He stood up, and threw back his head, his face stern and quiet, his frank blue eyes sombre and dark; and so the men saw him, as they paused outside and looked through the little window.

"His blood 's up," Sandy McCullum said. "You 'll waste your breath on him. He 'll fight for his dollars when he would n't have pluck enough to fight for aught else."

Slocum had pushed forward, and looked at him fiercely.

"The destroyer of innocents!" he said. "Quiet, men. Your turn comes after mine."

Sandy fell back as Slocum opened the door, and went forward a step or two. Mr. Longshore looked at him steadily. The man's attitude and expression were hostile and aggressive. The half-dozen others seemed awkward and embarrassed, save Sandy, who had started violently as he recognized in the unknown owner the man he had denounced so bitterly as he faced him at the door of Mrs. Rooney's room. The recognition was mutual. Mr. Longshore flushed deeply, then collected himself.

"One more reason for a thing that needs no reasons," he thought, and looked again at Slocum, who found himself for the moment at a loss for the right words, and stood uneasily moistening his dry lips with his tongue, and interlocking his fingers nervously.

Mr. Longshore's composure had returned. He stood there, calm and cool, the embodiment of all that the hot-headed reformer most detested ; and yet, for the moment, face to face with one of the despised class, he felt a sudden sense of inferiority, and lashed himself inwardly that such sense should be possible.

"Curse his cool face!" he said, under his breath.

Mr. Longshore smiled slightly as his quick ear caught the words.

"Ay, you laugh. Your kind all laugh," Slocum said bitterly. "You've had your way since money was first coined, and you think the laugh will always be on your side. It's a small matter to you that thirty men are brought down to wages that barely keep soul and body together, and that you're ready to grind them lower still to keep your own hands and your own place soft. You've got to hear the truth for once; and because not one of them will face you, for fear even the beggars' bit you give them will be cut off, I, who owe you nothing, and have no fear of living soul, speak for them. They're not the ruck of the streets ; creatures with only the hint of a soul, that it's small use now to do aught for but let them die off, and give their betters a chance. They are decent men, — men that love their lives, that love their wives and their children, no less than you ; that need a chance ; that shall have a chance if every capitalist must have his throat cut to secure it. What have they done, that their children must go barefoot, half fed, untaught ? What have they done, that the ten hours' labor means only a dollar, and that your tool there tells them they are lucky in not being cut down to ninety cents ? Whatever you've got, men's hands have earned for you. You walk at your ease over human souls and bodies, and smile when they dare turn and ask you who gave you the right to such pavement. If besotted luxury has left

you any soul, if there 's reason or justice or decency in one of your cursed tribe, answer now, who gave you the right to live on the life-blood of other men, and to take your ease while they die of slow starvation before your eyes ? "

McCullum shook his head. " He 's done for us now," he said. " There ain't a man on the earth that would n't turn ugly, hauled up like that."

" Have you finished what you have to say ? " Mr. Longshore said, as Slocum paused, his gaunt frame quivering with excitement.

" There 's more to come. If I talked all day, there 'd still be more to come," he said. " It 's your turn to answer if you 've got an answer. And you 're not to count my words against these men. There must be a voice for them and their fellows, workers everywhere ; and that voice I am vowed to be till this tongue crumbles into dust, and I go on to make report of you and your kind before the one Judgment-seat where justice is sure."

Mr. Longshore turned from him with that curious smile again on his face.

" My men," he said, " can't you speak for yourselves ? "

McCullum stepped forward suddenly, his deep-set eyes gleaming under the heavy brows.

" It 's the truth he 's told," he said. " I 'm not sayin' it 's the way I 'd have set it out, an' I 'm nigh certain he 's done for us, but it 's the truth. We can't live, an' there 's no way out of it. Figure the thing yourself, an' see how far a dollar 'll go in a day, when there 's wife an' children, and they to be clothed and fed. We 're down to the last pitch. Figure it yourself."

" I have," Mr. Longshore said, after a moment's pause, in which he looked into the pairs of eyes bent upon him, a threat and an appeal in each, — " I have.

It can't be done, and as long as you are in my employ it never shall be done. My men, owners and capitalists are not all rascals. They have only followed old ways without thinking. Smith will pay you at ten to-morrow morning the difference between what you have earned and what you have been paid since these reductions began, and your wages are back at the old figures from this time on. Times are hard, and workmen are more plenty than work; but so long as I live hereafter I take my share of losses, and deal by you as I hope to be dealt by when my own account is handed in. And for you, my friend," he added, turning to the amazed Slocum, "I advise different methods. It is no thanks to you that I have not been driven into putting the screws on harder. You and your kind are the enemies of the working-man. You happen to be honest, but you are just as dangerous as the rest. The next time there is a grievance, come to me, or to any other man who is an employer, and try rational speech instead of wholesale denunciation."

"Sir, I ask your pardon," McCullum said, as he rose from the box to which he had sunk in the first moment of bewildered listening. "I took you for a bad man, an' it's plain to see I was a fool, an' worse. I ask your pardon humbly. Would you mind shaking hands for a token you're not laying up aught ag'in us? They're honest men, every one, an' they'll do honest work for you as long as they've got hands to move."

"I believe it," Mr. Longshore said heartily, as one after another the men, shamefaced and dazed with the sudden revulsion, shook hands, and then stood looking with puzzled, grateful eyes at this incomprehensible employer, whose face Slocum was studying intently. He put out his hand as Mr. Longshore went toward the office.

"I have no pardon to ask, for I speak from such light as I have," he said; "but I'd like a word with you in a quiet place, and soon, if you will give it."

Mr. Longshore hesitated, and there was strong disrelish in the look he turned upon him.

"I have no time for theories," he said, "and no liking for your principles; but I never bear malice, and I can give you a short time this evening if you want it. — On the whole, I think I am a fool to have done it," he added to himself, as he nodded to the men, still clustered about Sandy, and went into the office, where the disgusted Smith had listened with a deepening conviction that his employer's wits were gone. It was a good berth. He could keep his opinions to himself, and more than probably there would be a change, and common sense come to the front once more. In any case, now that he knew which way the wind blew, his course was plain, and he began an effusive tribute to Mr. Longshore's generosity.

"That will do, Smith," the latter said quietly, after a moment, in which his shrewd eyes had taken in the small thoughts of the small soul. "Pay the men for the month in full, up to Saturday night, and make no remarks outside as to what I have chosen to do. Whatever the men were worth as earners three months ago they are worth now. — I wish Margaret were here," he added to himself as he walked away, feeling curiously light and buoyant. "I am a weak-kneed fellow, that can't stand alone. I wanted to stand there and tell them everything I wanted to do, — everything I mean to do; but this is enough for a beginning. Poor souls! To think that a few dollars more at the end of a week should mean so much. Sally would have thawed if she could have seen those faces. Poor Sally!"

He sighed again as he thought of her; but happiness was stronger than trouble, and all the way, as

he hung by the strap, — his portion of the accommodation afforded at that hour by the surface roads, — his thoughts were still with the men, and the changes that a short time even might work. Mr. Savage Logan, screened behind the "Commercial Advertiser," watched with interest the absorbed face of the prosperous broker, whose radiant expression was not of the nature occasioned by a sudden rise in stocks.

"He looks as if he 'd just got religion," thought the lawyer, returning to the formulas of his youth. "Something is up quite out of the common. It would be a great joke if Longshore should go in for a deaconship. I don't know anything that would destroy confidence in him quicker. Well-rounded, symmetrical cheating requires a thorough-going church-member. It can't be had in perfection outside."

Parker rubbed his hands as his master ran whistling up the stairs, and down again to the waiting horses, and Lennox, who came up the stairs just in time to take his place in the buggy and listen with delight to the tale poured out to him. Over the dinner the talk still went on, Parker shaking his head as he caught strange and unaccustomed words. There is no aristocrat like your well-trained and decorous butler or waiter, the foundations of whose world rest on established form; and he looked with inquiring disapproval at the young man who did not pay sufficient attention to his dinner, and who merely colored his water with claret. His feelings received an added shock as he admitted Jared Slocum, who strode in oblivious of all the proprieties, and made his way at once to the point from which voices came; and the culmination of outrage was reached an hour later, as he caught the final words of the audacious intruder: —

"As far as you've gone you are right; but how far? But the beginning of the first step. Not till this luxury in which you riot has been sent to the winds, not till you follow word for word the command, 'Sell *all* that thou hast, and give to the poor,' will you have entered truly on the path the world must tread. Do this, and your name goes down to all time as one of the sacred few that knew truly the brotherhood of man. Refrain, and the gold you hold to shall be as a millstone about your neck, dragging you down to perdition."

Dr. Strothers had come in; and Slocum, who had risen, and, as he grew more and more excited, waved his long arms and walked hurriedly up and down the room, turned upon him with sudden fierceness.

"Ay, you sit there," he said, "studying with your scientific eyes the man you call a crazy fanatic, and chuckling over your own conception of the rights of man and your faint-hearted fashions of help. You call it charity, and love of your kind, and all the pig-wash of cant that goes down with what they call philanthropists. The voice you will not hear has said, 'He that is not with me is against me.' Judgment is on the way. You, too, will hear, 'I never knew you: depart from me.'"

He paused, tears rolling down his dark face, then turned with one backward gesture of scorn, and, passing the dismayed but furious Parker, literally shook the dust from his feet as he paused a moment on the threshold, and then went out into the night. The air was still heavy with heat; but Mr. Longshore shivered slightly as the door closed, and the three looked at one another. Dr. Strothers was the first to speak.

"It is a misfortune that a man with his power should bend it simply to destruction," he said. "He can undo in an evening work that a mind like

Lessing's has taken years to build up. You must see Lessing, Longshore, and get the comfortable side of socialism. He is just as dead in earnest as this lunatic, but balanced and sweet, — one of the most quietly rational minds I ever met. I shall see him to-morrow, and in a week or two, at most, I think, he will be back in his old place."

"Let us hear more about him," Lennox said. He had been looking at Dr. Strothers with an expression of quiet satisfaction. This was a friend worth having, and he colored with pleasure at the look which Dr. Strothers bent upon him as he said, —

"You are like him, — younger, slighter, and most distinctively American, — but you could easily be a younger brother born in this country, we will say. I'll tell you all I know about him, which, after all, is not very much, and it must be done in fifteen minutes — there is a patient to see at ten just round the corner. — I recommend a week in Newport as soon as you can take it, Longshore," he said, as his host followed him to the door. "You are not quite in order yet, and an entire change will be good for you."

"I shall take it as soon as I see my way clear," Mr. Longshore answered; but he shook his head as he went back to Lennox, with whom he talked for an hour longer, then ordered him summarily to bed, pondering, long after he had gone to his own, how the breach might be repaired.

At Foxgrove the days had flown. The old look of quiet content had come back to Lessing's face; Meg gained hour by hour, her pale cheeks recovering some tint of health; and Felix, who had at first resented Lessing's attention to the other children, played with them contentedly. Rose fitted in at once, mending and making for the small tribe who

left witnesses of their presence on every fence, and had given Mrs. Beebe much undesired needlework. Mrs. Herndon watched it all quietly, coming and going at will, and smiling as she saw the unconscious absorption in one another of the chief actors in the scene. For a day Meg had been shy and retreating as she remembered the look in Lessing's eyes; but he was so essentially himself that insensibly the old relation was assumed, though among all these strangers it could hardly be quite the same. Nothing would be the same till she was back in the old place, and the old work once more filled her life; and she drank in the sweet air and ate all she was bid, with a longing for this life, but a sense of new and better days to come. With Lessing content was uppermost, but question had come. It was quite possible to go on in the old fashion — and yet, was it possible? Long ago the vow had been tacitly made, — the vow that bound him to service for his fellows and set personal happiness aside. Wife and children had no part in the life he had chosen, and doubly when in the background was a past from which hateful inheritance might come. He studied Meg's face in unobserved moments, and sighed as he saw how youthful the lines still were. Twenty years between them; and while he felt sure that this could make small difference, he doubted if it were just, even if objections could be set aside, to ask the sacrifice. Better be silent and content with the affection that had no disguises, and that was his securely, from both mother and child. Over and over he resolved that nothing should be changed, and over and over he found himself lost in pondering the uncertain question.

"She is settled and calm, and cares not," he thought. "Such marriage as she knows is all terror and loss; but how if some man will seek her, who sees her beauty and knows what true soul has grown in her,

and stops not for a theory, but has faith? And if one will, why not another? Why not this one, that is two men to-day, — one all a doubter, the other with all faith?"

Felix had followed him to the little knoll set thick with shrubbery and open only to the Sound; and Lessing took his face suddenly between his hands, and looked deep into the dark eyes that studied him in return, till they fell abashed, and lifted again full of tears.

"It is her face," he said, as he put his arms around the boy and pressed him close, Felix clinging to him in instant response. "There is not a line of the evil soul that gave him life. Yet such love as such soul could know was in the beginning. Will love redeem? Shall one trust to it, and know, as often I tell Meg, that the black drop is purged away forever when love rules?"

Dr. Strothers had come unheard toward the knoll, and as he parted the bushes, paused, at the moment that Lessing had clasped the child close, and looked seriously at the pair. The slight movement had been felt by Felix, who gave a joyful cry and sprang forward as he saw his friend. Lessing moved a little, as he held out his hand; and Dr. Strothers sat down on the rustic bench, and bared his forehead to the light breeze that came at moments and then died away, too languid to do more than faintly stir the leaves about their covert. Lessing looked at him questioningly, still holding his hand, and a sudden resolution gleamed in his abstracted eyes.

"You are true man," he said. "It would be shame else, to the woman, to ask any question. But you shall know where my mind wanders, and will heed no call to stay at home. See, now. If sorrow had not come, all would have been in one way. I was content. It was all good. And then I lose her, and

know that life is ill without her, but even then I say, 'It is a thing not to be. We shall go side by side always, the paths so near; hands shall touch, but never nearer.' But will fails, and has no more voice. My friend, tell me. Have I wrong or have I right, in that I would make for myself home, where wife and child shall be?"

"Right," Dr. Strothers answered emphatically.

"Why?"

"You know why. You have argued the case pro and con. You need no argument of mine."

"Poor; sworn to my fellows; old — too old for her youth, — that is my side. How shall right be in forgetting it?"

"Rich in all that makes life worth living; no more vowed to serve than Meg herself; and for your third point, youth is not a matter of years, and you are one of the immortally young. If that is all, you should waste no more time in questioning."

Lessing was silent, though he had smiled with pleasure as the earnest words were spoken.

"There is more," Dr. Strothers said, after a long pause. "You are thinking what laws of inheritance may work themselves out, and if you have the right to dare their consequences. Such life as I have known has taught me that even here love is mightier than any natural force. Love has redeemed Meg, and the old husk has dropped away. Have faith that from her purified nature, struggling always and conquering so truly that not one of us thinks of her past as any part of her real self, can come only something with the same tendency. Have faith that good is stronger than evil, and that you, to whom love is all, may safely trust it to the end. Hopeless disease, deformity, insanity, — these are different matters. But here is a nature loving and craving love. No matter what vicious quitch may have been in the blood, that

phase is over. No, Lessing, speaking to you from the most solemn thought I can have about it, I say go on, and take what you have earned. If you choose to ask, I think there is small doubt as to the result."

"I will not that it shall come from gratitude," Lessing said with sudden fierceness. "If it may not be for myself, never shall it be!"

Dr. Strothers laughed softly.

"You are as irrational as all lovers," he said. "Ask your question, and I think you will soon be satisfied."

Lessing shook his head.

"I see it not yet," he said. "When Meg is well, and we are all in the old way again, it will be easy — it may be — I know not well. I could even think shame of myself to ask at all. And you!" he said suddenly, turning upon Dr. Strothers. "You who counsel so well, and are young, and with all good that life holds, — you have no such reason as I. I ask nothing, but eyes are mine. Let it be also with you, my friend."

Dr. Strothers flushed, but met the kind eyes steadily.

"In time I may have my story, too," he said, "but not now."

A sudden irruption of children ended the conversation; and Dr. Strothers strolled down to the shore, still smiling as he thought, and stood there, looking off to Long Island, and the white sails now beginning to fill. The breeze had freshened, and as the placid water in the cove roughened and broke in little white waves on the sand, he dropped into a small sailboat lying at the end of the wharf, and, unreefing the sail, gave himself for an hour to the wind, coming in at last, sunburned and hungry, and deciding that one night away from town would do no harm. They gathered on the piazza after the supper was over, and the children had gone reluctantly to bed; and Meg,

for the first time, joined them, and reclined in a steamer-chair, the moonlight falling on her crown of dark hair, and making an aureole about the beautiful face at which Lessing looked with longing but still uncertain eyes. They had talked of New York and the work waiting for them, and listened with absorbed attention as Dr. Strothers told the story of Slocum's interview, and Longshore's enthusiasm, and the new element that had suddenly developed itself in Lennox.

Mrs. Beebe came out with her knitting, and shook her head as she pondered the mysteries she had as yet found beyond her understanding. Why folks, when they had plenty, were n't content to put most of it in the bank was always unaccountable; but Mrs. Herndon had not had so much pleasure out of her money that she should be denied this, or anything else she wanted. She went in presently, and made the round of the house, looking at locks and bolts. There had been a burglary lately a mile away, and it should not be her fault if Foxgrove came next. Even when all was settled for the night, she emerged suddenly in a costume calculated to carry terror to the soul of any average burglar, and once more went through the lower floor suspiciously, turning back with a sigh of relief as every door and window proved to be securely fastened.

Meg had talked for a little with Mrs. Herndon, and, as she said good-night, laid her cheek against Margaret's hand, — the one caress she permitted herself. Falling quickly to sleep, with a new sense of rest and strength that had come to her, she opened her eyes suddenly at last, wondering if morning could have come so soon, and sat up, as a faint sound came to her from the lower hall. It ceased instantly, but, as she listened, seemed to come from the room below. One of the children had once or

twice walked in its sleep; and as Meg remembered this, she lighted a candle and stole softly down the broad stairway to the dining-room, from which the last sound had come. It was a long room, the butler's pantry at the end; and as she stood there, the same slight movement was heard again. Meg stole toward it. The child must not be wakened suddenly, for it might cry out and rouse the house. She set her candle on the sideboard between the windows, and pushed open the door, stifling a cry as she saw bending over the drawer, where the silver ordinarily in use was kept, the figure of a man, who, at the same instant, warned by the gleam of light, sprang up, and, as he turned, showed a face unseen for years — Ben!

"Make one sound and I'll send a bullet through you," he said, as she stood motionless; and then, a moment later, "I'll be hanged if it ain't Meg! That makes it all straight," he went on, after a pause, in which he lowered the pistol aimed at her, and smiled, as if reassured. "You'll save me some time, Meg, for you can tell me just the spot to put my hand on what I'm after. It's well it's you and nobody else, for I ain't partikilar about finishing anybody."

His tone had changed as he watched her.

"No airs!" he said. "I'll swear you let me in, if you go to putting on any, and they'll believe fast enough. If they don't know you're the same sort, it won't take them long to find out."

"Ben, they've been good to me. They've done everything for me," Meg said, at last, with a hope that this might weigh with him. "I've got some money upstairs that Mrs. Herndon gave me. I'll give it all to you if you'll go away and let things alone."

"You're a bigger fool than I took you for," Ben said, with a look of contempt. "Come, now. Here's

only a part of what a house like this is good for. Where 's the rest ? "

He had taken her arm, and gave her a little shake as he spoke. Meg was silent; and as she stood, another figure came out of the gloom, and blew out the candle as it came.

" Are you clean mad, talking here fit to rouse the house ? " the man said. " Is it sweethearting you are ? "

" There 'd be some chance if it was," he said. " She 's a sister that cut an' run long ago, an' that 's too fine now for doings she 's well used to. I 'll give you one more chance," he went on, turning to Meg. " Will you help, or are you bound to hinder ? "

" No use in mere words," his companion said, as Meg stood obstinately silent. Ben nodded and caught her arms, as something was suddenly thrust violently into her mouth and tied about her head. She struggled violently, freeing one hand as a rope was drawn about her, and reaching out for the pistol.

" No, you don't," Ben said, with an oath ; but her fingers had already caught it, and, as he spoke, she fired, the ball crashing through the window. With a blow that felled her to the floor, the two men rushed to the upper end of the room, and through the window, from which they had cut a pane. There was a rush above her head. Flying feet came down the stairs, and Mrs. Beebe's shrill voice was heard ordering Rose to stop screaming and let her go to find out what the matter was. In an instant the room was filled, — the broken window telling the tale, — and Dr. Strothers sprang toward the butler's pantry, as he heard a movement there. Meg had fallen as she received the blow, and for a moment lay there half stunned, then scrambled to her feet, vainly trying to pull the suffocating gag from her mouth. Her knees were shaking. She could hardly stand. Her

long hair had loosened and fell about her in a cloud, and as Dr. Strothers burst in and seized the supposed burglar with an iron grip, he started back in amazement.

"Meg! It is Meg!" he cried.

Lessing made one bound to the door as he heard these words.

"Meg! Always Meg that must be hurt!" he said passionately, as he caught her in his arms. "And now she will die! she is dead, and knows not that I would spill my life for her!"

Meg had gasped a moment as Dr. Strothers pulled away the gag, then fallen back; and Lessing lifted her, waving back every one, and carried her to her own room, his face as pale as hers. Meg opened her eyes as he laid her down, and met his, full of the anguish he would not speak. Mrs. Herndon had followed, and bent over her; but Lessing motioned her away and knelt by the bed.

"Liebchen," he said, "I know not if thou wilt live or die; but if it is life, give thyself to me. Never any more must such chances come, else my heart will break. See, Meg! I love thee well — with all my soul. Can it be that thou wilt love me also?"

"She cannot answer you, dear Lessing," Mrs. Herndon said. "Go away now and leave her to me."

"She will speak. I cannot go without it," Lessing said, all self-control swept away by this new disaster. "Meg, you can speak. Tell me now, my heart's love."

Meg's beautiful eyes were fixed on his face. She had flushed, then paled again as she looked; but life, keen and strong, was in the look. She had turned toward Mrs. Herndon, who stood with averted head, the candle flickering in her hand, and in wonder as to what extraordinary phase of the drama would next develop itself.

"You are asking me because you think I am hurt — because you are sorry," Meg said ; and her voice was clear and strong. "I am not hurt. It was only for a moment. It won't hinder my getting well. You will not want me then."

"I want thee forever!" Lessing said. "Tell me, Meg — now — to-night; I must know. Tell me if thou wilt be my wife?"

Meg put out her hand and drew Margaret's to her cheek.

"If she thinks I am fit — that it will not be wicked," she said brokenly.

Mrs. Herndon did not speak. She took Meg's hand and guided it to Lessing's, who caught it and pressed it to his breast, then bent over and kissed her softly.

"It is a vow," he said. "Now have I courage for all things!" and, leaving her to such care as might be needed, he went down to the hall, where the coachman was displaying a hat that he had just picked up under the window.

"That an' the pistol had ought to do somethin' toward catchin' 'em," he said. "We 'll have detectives down here, first thing in the mornin'."

"There 's been enough fuss for one night," said the scandalized housekeeper. "Every one o' you to bed, an' settle down quick too, or I 'll know the reason why. It 's enough to kill Mrs. Herndon, an' Meg too, the way you 're all going on. Why ain't you up looking after 'em?" she added, with a look of deep reproach at Dr. Strothers, who had just come in from an ineffectual search among the shrubbery. Meg had for the moment been forgotten ; and he ran up to her room, relieved to find that no harm had been done, and that, though she had cried a little, she was resting comfortably, and likely to sleep. Lessing followed, and stood waiting till he came out.

"Is all well?" he asked anxiously.

"All 's well," Dr. Strothers answered; and then, as he caught the look in Lessing's face, he laughed softly.

"So that uncertainty is over?" he said. "You will sleep well, my friend."

XXI.

LESSING was walking up and down the broad piazza as Mrs. Herndon appeared next morning, and came toward her eagerly, flushing as he met her smiling eyes, and bowing low over her extended hand.

"I have need of grace," he said; "but you have much to give, and it is more that I shall ask when breakfast is over and you can come here. I think many things as the night goes on. Is it well with Meg?"

"She is sleeping still," Mrs. Herndon said, as Dr. Strothers came up from the shore, fresh from a plunge in the Cove, and followed by Felix, to whom he had given a first lesson in swimming.

"One appetite is a certainty," he said. "Mine began at seven, when I came down and watched the nine children encompassing gallons of milk and no end of loaves of bread; and if it was well developed then, what shall be said of it now? Don't look at it," he added, as they entered the dining-room, and Mrs. Herndon gave a slight involuntary shudder as she looked toward the broken window. "One is never so safe as directly after an accident, you know; and no harm has been done here, really, save the fright."

"Then you think there will be no bad consequences for Meg?"

"A few bruises, that is all; and the sort of medicine she has taken is efficacious beyond any drug it has ever been my fortune to exhibit."

"That 's a singular use to make of a word," Mrs. Herndon said, after a moment, in which she had watched Lessing move away, followed by the swarm. "If it could end in exhibition, well and good; but it does not, your definition being something swallowed on the spot. Suppose I simply exhibited this coffee. Would that content you?"

"Everything contents me at present," Dr. Strothers said, as he took the cup composedly. "Even the excitement has accomplished something that otherwise would still have delayed. With every-day people we should say, 'How will they get along?' but Lessing follows his own code of laws, and will care for Meg in his own fashion."

"I have a plan for them," Mrs. Herndon said presently, when she had dismissed the little waitress. "They must have more space; yet he is so wedded to that one spot that I think he would hardly be content elsewhere, and Meg is like him. Do you know how he has it? — of Heilbrun or of the owner?"

"I know that Heilbrun, who has money in plenty, apparently, for his way of living, leased the whole, and sublets to Lessing. He is master there. And, by the way, I wonder how he will take the news. He has been very jealous of Meg. That I saw long ago, when I first began to go there; but he has sympathies under that cynical manner, and may be glad to have some happiness come to the pair. What is your plan?"

"To reconstruct that house, if I can get hold of it in any way; add a story to it, and make space for the new home, without necessarily disturbing Heilbrun more than for a time. I planned it all this morning. The new story can hold more room for Lessing's various protégés, and he can still have his shop and live as he will, so far as that is concerned. And in the summer they shall come here, and live

in the lodge, and keep guard over the children. This is all chaotic, though. He may have some plan of his own."

"He will try to do what is best for Meg," Dr. Strothers said; and they chatted on till breakfast ended, and Mrs. Herndon herself prepared and carried up a tray with Meg's breakfast, and looked disappointed as she shook her head.

"My mouth is sore from that thing they pushed in," Meg said, after an effort to eat. "I will drink the milk, and by night it will begin to feel better. I thought I was going to feel wicked this morning. I ought to when I remember."

"Remember what?" Mrs. Herndon asked, as Meg hesitated.

"Who it was that I found there," Meg said. "I am never anything but trouble to you. It was Ben, my brother; and how do I know but he will come again to try and rob you, that have done everything for me?"

"Hush!" Mrs. Herndon said, after a startled pause, for Meg was crying again. "You must not waste any strength in crying. Tell nobody but Lessing, unless —"

She stopped suddenly. Detectives were on the way, and might be there any moment, for the first morning train was already in. "Tell me the whole of it," she said. "How did you happen to go down?"

"I thought it was Sandy walking in his sleep," Meg said; "and I am never afraid. I was n't afraid even when they began to tie me. But if Ben is caught, and I have to tell, it will be I that send him to prison. Don't you see how always I bring trouble to everybody that belongs to me, whether I love them or not? I don't care for Ben; I could n't ever; but I would n't send him to prison if I could help it."

"Perhaps he will not be found," Mrs. Herndon said. "Don't think about it. They must have come now," she added hastily, as the sound of men's voices was heard in the hall. "Lie still, Meg. You shall not have to see them if I can help it."

"But I shall have to; I know enough for that," Meg said, a look of quiet resolution coming into her face. "I am glad I am almost well, and feel strong."

Mrs. Herndon left the room hastily.

"'There's no time so miserable but a man may be true,'" she said under her breath. "Meg will face anything now."

Three officers had answered the summons, and had already made an examination of the premises.

"The person who saw them is the one to talk with," the chief spokesman said, after a question or two. "It is a woman, I am told. One of the servants?"

"A friend of mine," Mrs. Herndon said. "She was recovering from long illness, and is also weak from the shock, but she can see you if necessary."

"We can't do much without it," the man said deprecatingly, and waited while Mrs. Herndon went up again to prepare Meg, sending Rose shortly to say that they were ready. Meg gave her testimony unfalteringly till she came to the name.

"You'd seen him before, then?" the officer said with a keen look. "We know him. He's an old case, and this ought to send him up for the rest of his life. What name did you know him under?"

"Ben Duke," Meg said, after an instant's pause.

"He began with that, but he dropped it fifteen years ago," the officer said. "He's Thomas Humphreys now, but he's had a dozen names."

Meg flushed deeply as his eyes still fixed themselves on her.

"I knew about him when I was little," she said. "Must I say anything more?"

"Whatever you know, it's your business to tell," he returned, looking at her still more suspiciously. "How did you know him?"

"He is my brother," Meg said. "I could not help but know him."

The officer started in amazement, but collected himself. There was more in this than met the eye. Rich women were easily gulled, and Mrs. Herndon had chosen a singular friend. There had been occasion more than once for tracing Ben's history, and the family tree had been ornamented with more than one noose. He went downstairs thoughtfully, and spent some time in examining the inside fastenings of the windows, shaking his head at last, as he called his men, and went on toward the station for further investigation.

"It is just what I thought it would be," Meg said, as he left the room. "He thinks I had something to do with Ben's coming. It is always more and more trouble for anybody that has anything to do with me. It will be so always. Everything quiet and good till I have almost forgotten, and then, all at once, something starting up that has been there all the time, and that I had no right to forget. I could not help answering last night, but it was wicked. I must never do it."

"Foolish Meg!" Mrs Herndon said. "Stop thinking, and say nothing more. If there were ten Bens, and each one of them had burned the house down, it would make no difference. You have nothing to do but get well, and then we shall see."

She hurried away. To discuss the matter would only increase the trouble. It was specially unfortunate that it had come just now, but, after all, made no real difference. Dr. Strothers and Lessing were on the piazza, talking eagerly; and both came toward her as she paused in the doorway.

"I am to tell Heilbrun," Dr. Strothers said, smiling, "and secure his blessing beforehand. I am just off to that end and others, but will return to-night, if you allow, as a temporary guard. And Lessing, here, has a proposition that I shall leave him to submit."

"It is a boy's haste, you will say," said Lessing, as the doctor hurried away. "But many things make it right. Meg will have always something that must hurt, till I am by her and keep away what I can. It is a permission I ask. I would marry her to-day."

"My dear friend!" Mrs. Herndon began; but Lessing checked her.

"You have right in all you will say, I know," he said anxiously. "I mean not to take her away. I mean only to do all as you will, after some form that is necessary shall be over. Call who you will, but let me know to-day that always I may answer when one has word against Meg. See, now, I know what thought has come to these men. It means nought, it may be, yet she will think it much. Tell me now that you will."

"Meg will not consent," Mrs. Herndon said, after a pause, in which she met Lessing's pleading eyes with less and less firmness.

"She will do what you say, and you will make her hear me," Lessing said eagerly.

Mrs. Herndon still hesitated, but there was no real reason to urge. No ordinary considerations had, or needed to have, weight with this unworldly man, who had been too long a law to himself to care for comment or gossip.

"If Meg is willing," she said at last, "it might be the best thing that could happen."

"It is the best thing," Lessing said quietly. "I wait now while you go and ask if I may find some minister where I can, and bring him to-day."

Mrs. Herndon went silently up the stairs, and, tapping lightly at Meg's door, went in, surprised to find her dressed, and with some mending for Felix in her lap. A dark bruise on her right cheek was the only token of the encounter of the night; and though she still moved her right arm with difficulty, there was more of the old Meg in the quiet figure than had shown itself for months. Argue as she might, happiness was too strong for her, and she looked up with a smile into this face that had meant for her always the best her life had known.

"You want something," she said, after a moment. "Is it anything I am to do?"

"Yes," Mrs. Herndon said quietly. "You are to be ready at noon for Lessing and the minister, Meg. He will be married to-day."

"To-day!" Meg cried, her work falling to the floor. "To-day! I never said to-day."

"I know it, but he does. He has waited long enough. You must do exactly what he wishes, Meg."

"And you say I must?" Meg said, in a breathless tone.

"Yes, I say that you must. It is what we all want."

"But I did not mean to at all."

Mrs. Herndon smiled involuntarily.

"I know you did not, Meg, but you see he did. Now rest, for I am going to tell him you will be ready."

She was gone before Meg could make further remonstrance, and hurried down.

"Go when you please; she will be ready," she said; and Lessing, with one word of fervent thanks, was off, pursued instantly by Felix, who had been watching the changes of his face with perplexed interest. The village was two miles distant; but in

good time a minister was secured, who offered the use of his own buggy for the return, when he learned where the wedding was to be, and spent some fruitless effort in questioning this serene and mysterious stranger, who seemed walking in a dream, and had more look of the other world than this. And he looked with equal wonder on the face that turned toward him, as, a few minutes later, Lessing led slowly to the upper end of the long drawing-room, decked hastily with flowers and vines, the bride, still in the black dress she could not be induced to lay aside.

"Black or white, I care not, so that it is soon over," Lessing said, as Mrs. Beebe came to him to beg that he should persuade Meg out of this unlucky color. "What she will like most, that is what shall be. I have no bridegroom's dress myself," he added, looking down at his plain suit, spotlessly neat, but of the cheapest. "I could wish my own better, but what difference shall it make for either?"

Felix had pressed to his mother's side, and took her hand, as she stood there, embarrassing the little minister by the intentness of his gaze, and holding his place in spite of many significant and imperative nods and becks from Mrs. Beebe. He had been told, so far as it could be made plain to him, the nature of the ceremony, and had danced wildly about Lessing as he came toward Meg and took her hand gravely and tenderly, looking for a moment deep into her eyes. Meg did not shrink, but answered the look with one that brought tears into his.

"I am not fit," she whispered. "Oh, I know I am not fit, but I will grow so if I can."

"Hush, my Meg," Lessing answered, almost sternly. "Say that no more. If it should be, by and by, comfort to talk it all, then speak; but we have done with that word."

The children looked in from the piazza windows as they entered the room. Rose cried softly in the corner. Margaret stood near them, her white dress the one suggestion of brightness, but a veiled anxiety in her eyes. For Meg this could mean nothing but good; for Lessing there might hereafter be question, and she would be responsible for any evil.

"It cannot be evil; it must be good," she thought, as the short ceremony ended, and the little minister gave his blessing, slightly indignant as Meg declined the customary salute, but mollified by a fee beyond his wildest expectations.

"I am married! I am married! We are all married!" Felix spelled out on his fingers, as Mrs. Herndon cut the cake which Mrs. Beebe produced from her stores; and the children dispersed with their slices and settled down on the west piazza, their special property, to talk over the mysterious occurrence, and to argue with Felix at last that he knew nothing about such things, and could not be married till he was grown up and knew enough to understand everything from the lips. But Felix persisted. His mother was married, Lessing was married; he had stood up and looked at the minister, too, and necessarily was married also: and there the matter rested.

Miss Biggs nodded vigorously, as some days later she appeared, and listened with incredulous amazement to Mrs. Beebe's unusual store of gossip.

"They don't seem married a mite more than they have all along," the housekeeper ended. "I hain't quite made up my mind as to the rights of it; but there 's no denyin' he thinks a sight o' her, an' she no less o' him. But they 've had some kind of a lawyer over here to take her testimony, an' turn it all inside out with questions, an' if they catch the fellers that broke in, she 'll have to go into court."

"That ain't any worse 'n goin' into any other room

full o' folks, as long 's you keep a-rememberin' they *are* folks, an' no more sense 'n the rest of us, — sometimes not so much." And Miss Biggs proceeded to relate a portion of her own experience, in which she had silenced an impertinent cross-examiner, and brought applause from the entire court.

"What beats me," she continued, as the tale ended, "is to see what a sudden turn she took. At death's door, you might say, one day, an' there it was, part scare and part hankerin', an' he about as bad. Sometimes I've a good mind to think body don't count no way, so long 's your mind can go ahead an' suit itself; an' it don't count as much as folks think, any time."

Mrs. Beebe shook her head disapprovingly. Her own angular body was the most palpable fact in her experience; and, valuable member of society as Miss Biggs had proved herself, it was her theories that had kept her unsettled, and made her oblivious of the need of laying up for a rainy day.

"You 're a-wonderin' if I ever had a chance, an', if I did, why I did n't take it an' settle down," said Miss Biggs, after a pause; and the housekeeper started guiltily. Miss Biggs laughed. "Don't be skeered," she said. "I can read deeper 'n that, when I give my mind to it, but I don't often take time now-a-days. I've had my chance, but I turned my back, praise an' hallelujah to think I did! an' here I be." And Miss Biggs folded her hands in gratitude for a moment, and then went in search of Meg.

Now that the examination had ended, and Meg might for the present be considered safe, Lessing had gone back to town for a few days. Dr. Strothers had fulfilled his mission to Heilbrun, who listened in silence to the story he had to tell, and looked at him with a saturnine smile as it ended.

"It had to come sooner or later," he said. "Let

us be thankful that he was spared to us so long. His work is done."

"There you are wrong, I think," Dr. Strothers said. "He does not stop growing because a graft has been added. On the contrary, the best fruit is yet to come. You will find it so."

"Your faith is large," Heilbrun said, after a critical look at the young man's face. "When you have my years you will know that marriage ends the working life, — ends all but labor whose end is self. It is in the order of things. I make no quarrel with it, but I know well the world's work is for celibates alone."

"That depends upon what you call the world's work," Dr. Strothers began; but Heilbrun interrupted him impatiently.

"I have asked my questions and answered them while you were a baby," he said, "and care no longer for a thing that is done. Men will be fools, and women as well, so long as water runs. He is not the first man that has dreamed into a face what he wanted there. But this one has a dog's faithfulness," he added, "and that is something. She will hold fast and drag him down and down, till he thinks only how her life shall be easy, and never more for the world he has loved and worked for." Lessing's unexpected appearance surprised him, but did not alter the conviction.

"Death or marriage, they have both the same end," he said. "I thought, when you went, that you, it might be, could not return, for your strength was gone. Strength is here again, but yours no longer. Away with you! It is to the army of the respectables that you now belong."

Lessing smiled gravely as he faced the angry little man.

"You are not rid of me by saying 'Away,'" he said. "Wait, and soon you will have another mind. Why

have you not said to me all this that McCullum tells? Have you yourself seen this Longshore, who is capitalist yet knows justice?"

"Why should I?" Heilbrun returned. "It is a freak, it may be. Make no cry over a convert till time has proved him. He must work out his thought as his mind frames it. It is good so far as it goes," he added, with sudden relenting, as Lessing turned away silently. "It is very good, and I have myself gone to him but yesterday to tell him so; but he is in Newport, and his cares lie easy on him. He gives of what is superfluity, — not out of his need."

"He gives wisely," Lessing said. "It is much for such as he to give at all."

Heilbrun growled under his breath, but smiled as he put out his hand, which Lessing took eagerly. Heilbrun's eyes were gentle; the fierce lines relaxed.

"Away, dreamer!" he said, almost affectionately. "I am no master of life, for you or for him. You have been doer as well as dreamer. See that you hold to such remnant as you can."

Newport had not held the release from care that Heilbrun imagined. With every day of the obstinate silence Mr. Longshore's spirits had lessened. He wrote his daily bulletin, for the break in old habits should not come from him. Business was pressing, for the complications between employers and workmen over the entire country had brought innumerable complications, through all of which he passed in safety. The tenants of the two houses had been warned, and the builders were already at work reconstructing the interiors, the possibilities of light and air having been made apparent for both. He had ceased to write any details to Sally; but his notebook was filling with memoranda of things he hoped to tell her when better understanding had come, — bits

of talk from his own men, comments of all sorts from interested observers, and hopes and plans of his own. Three weeks had passed before he felt that his way was clear, and telegraphed to his wife that he should be with her on the coming Sunday; and in spite of doubt and deeply wounded feeling, his heart leaped as the fresh breeze blew from the Sound, and the west held no longer spire and tower of the great city, but only the sunset glory. He fell asleep quietly when at last the stifling stateroom had cooled, and did not rouse till warned by a porter that Newport was in sight. His heart beat quickly as he went ashore, and found himself presently at the hotel. He would not disturb Sally till breakfast-time; and he tried to sleep again, tossing uneasily till day had come, and he set out for the cottage a mile away. The servants were not up; and when, finally, Melanie, Mrs. Longshore's maid, put her head from the window, she cried out in amazement, —

"Mon Dieu! It is Monsieur Longshore himself! It is not possible he does not know that Madame is gone, yesterday, to Mrs. Herndon?"

"Did no telegram come from me?" he asked, after a moment, in which he determined to put the best face possible on the matter.

"A telegram is come, yes," Melanie answered; "but not till Madame is gone, and I lay it, with letters that come, in her desk. Monsieur has not breakfasted. I shall call the cook."

Mr. Longshore's face had cleared.

"Things are mending," he thought, as the door was thrown open by the surprised and apologetic cook, the waitress not having as yet roused to a sense of the situation. "She would not go to Margaret if they were not. Now, if there is any way of getting across country to the New Haven road, I will sleep in Foxgrove to-night. No breakfast," he said, in reply

to the cook's suggestions. "I will go back to the hotel, and shall probably leave at once."

He looked about the dainty room as he spoke. A Sunday here would have done him good. He was tired and worn out with worry over Sally's unaccountable behavior, but there was cheer in the thought of Margaret, and he walked back slowly to the hotel. After all, it had happened for the best. He would not interfere with the course things had taken. He could leave at night; and if he stayed here quietly, Margaret would have all the more time to accomplish the hoped-for result. He breakfasted, and then walked back to the cottage and spent a quiet day, reading a little, wandering at intervals along the shore, and returning to the hammock, in which he swung or lay drowsily, resting and thinking over past and future.

Mrs. Herndon had hesitated on Saturday, strongly inclined to go to town, but withheld by some inscrutable reluctance. Meg, whose step was firm and who gained strength daily, had sat with her on the piazza for a time, and then led Felix away to bed. Lessing was to come later. He had been away a week, absorbed in the long-neglected work, and content to leave Meg where strength was most certain to return. He had shaken his head when Mrs. Herndon suggested the changes that could be made.

"Not yet," he said. "There is space still. Felix shall go to the little room within Heilbrun's, who loves him, though he will not say it, and we can still have life as it has been, till I see clearer. Meg is content. It is our life; but if more is better, we shall know. I shall not then refuse what you will do, but now, dear lady, we want not more giving. Our life must be ours, not yours. I can earn, and Meg also, if need be."

"But it is not a gift; it is an investment," Mrs.

Herndon said. "You will pay rent; I shall lose nothing." Lessing smiled as he shook his head.

"Not yet," he said, and turned away decisively. Nor did Meg prove more reasonable.

"I want what he wants," she said. "You think I have had so much all summer that I shall keep on wanting it, but I shall not. That is my own place; I want no other now. Once I thought I could never get back to it; that I had no home and no right anywhere, and now he has given it to me. Do you think I could change?"

Only this evening Meg had spoken, shyly, as always when deeper feeling was stirred, but with a certain pride; and Margaret smiled and then sighed, and fell into deep musing. She roused at last, as wheels sounded on the drive, and a carriage came swiftly up the long avenue. Some one had probably recognized Lessing at the station and brought him up, and she sat quietly, till it stopped, and a familiar figure sprang from the hastily opened door.

"Sally!" she cried in amazement as Mrs. Longshore ran up the steps and threw herself sobbing into her arms. "My dear child! what is it?"

"Pay that man, if you are willing to let me stay, and take me out of sight fast as you can," Mrs. Longshore said, retreating to a corner; and Margaret obeyed, saw that the trunk was carried up, and then returned to her guest.

"You must have supper, dear," she said.

"I hate supper. I don't want anything but you," Mrs. Longshore said vehemently. "I want to talk to you."

Margaret led the way silently to the blue room, with its balcony overlooking the Sound; and Mrs. Longshore threw off her hat, bathed her face, and then threw herself down near the window, with another burst of sobs.

"I hate you, Margaret," she said. "You are at the bottom of all my trouble. But I suppose I care for you more than I do for anybody else, and that's the reason I have come."

Mrs. Herndon was silent, waiting for the mystery to explain itself.

"Do you know what I've done?" Mrs. Longshore went on. "I've broken with Bert. I haven't written him a word. I was determined he should give up his dreadful notions and be like himself, and he wouldn't. I tried to have a good time, and I flirted awfully, and did everything fast that I could, and now everybody is talking about me. I warned Bert; I told him beforehand he'd better come, and he wouldn't. And so I wrote him Friday at last, and said I was too miserable to live, and we never should agree, and I was coming here, and he might get a divorce if he liked. Do you suppose he will? Oh, Margaret! do you suppose he will?"

"Probably not," Mrs. Herndon said, with a smile that Sally did not see. "What is the reason that you think he had better?"

"Because we can never agree again about anything. He wants to spend all the money on paupers, and have nothing for us. And he'd rather make plans and talk them over with horrid men than talk to me, or drive, or anything."

"Why don't you listen to them yourself?"

"Because I won't listen to anything that's going to cheat and rob me of what is my very own. And that's why I hate you, Margaret. You could have stopped him, but you were just as bad yourself, and you'd rather live with beggars and crazy people than decent ones. But I've tried it over three weeks. I'm almost dead, I've cried so much, and I'd do anything in the world if I could only put things back into the old place."

"You cannot do that," Mrs. Herndon said, as the pretty head lifted itself from her lap, and Mrs. Longshore's tear-stained and distracted little face pressed suddenly against hers. "You can never do that, but you can make a better one."

"Tell me just what you think, Margaret. I won't call names, or be any worse than I can help."

"I think that, in spite of your warm heart, you have always lived a selfish life. You have seemed unselfish because everything bent to you, but the first moment in which Bert ceased to follow your way you rebelled. He has always yielded to you because he loved you to infatuation. You should be ashamed to hold him in such fashion. You were making him selfish as yourself, caring only for ease and pleasure; and now that he sees that for every good received he owes a good in return, you stand in the way, and cry out that he shall not go on. Work with him, and you will have a new happiness better than anything you have ever known. Work against him, and you spoil his life and your own also."

"He has been complaining to you," Mrs. Longshore said bitterly.

"I have not seen him since I came here, and he has never spoken of your troubles."

"He is throwing away his money," Mrs. Longshore said, after a long pause.

"You will find that he is not. Sally, it can't be that you love money just as money."

"I do. I love to look at it; to have it in my pocket, to know I can have all I want. I'm mean, I suppose. I like things because they are *mine*. I'd kill anybody that robbed me, if I could. And Bert was mine, and now he never will be any more."

"He is yours more really than he ever was, if you choose to think so," Mrs. Herndon said, after a fresh

burst of sobs had quieted. "Sally, it is possible for you to turn about, too. Be patient. Do not resent what is done. Try and see what it means. You *must* conquer yourself, or your life is wrecked."

"I don't know how," Mrs. Longshore wailed. "I 'm jealous and selfish and ugly, and all the things I used to think I was n't; and I 've told Bert I don't care, and he 'll believe me, and I shall die. Oh, Margaret, Margaret!"

The sobs grew stronger, and at last threatened to become hysterical. Mrs. Herndon had ceased to argue, but sat there trying to quiet her, and persuading her at last to go to bed, where she presently fell asleep. Sunday spent itself in alternate tears and seasons of quiet in which she listened to the story of Lessing and Meg, and, in hearing, for a time forgot her trouble; but evening saw a renewal of it all, and Margaret decided to telegraph for Mr. Longshore. Monday morning brought small relief. Sally was really ill from excitement; and Margaret sat by her after the telegram had been sent, repeating over and over the assurance that Bert had not changed and would not.

"He 'll never love me again, never, never!" Sally moaned, as the morning wore away toward noon, and Mrs. Herndon had decided at last to send Lessing back to town in search of both Mr. Longshore and Dr. Strothers. She went down hastily at last, as the sound of wheels was heard, and put out her hands joyfully as Mr. Longshore sprang from the carriage.

"She is really ill, but you will cure her," she said, in answer to his hasty question; and he followed her up the stairs, and stood for a moment in the open door.

"Margaret," Sally said, "I don't know what to do. Give me some paper. I want to write to Bert, and

tell him I did n't mean it. But he 'll never love me again, never!"

"Poor little Sally!" was all he said, as he made one step to the bed, and took her in his arms; and she, after the first "Oh, Bert, forgive me! forgive me!" lay there silent, content, at last, to begin to walk with him in the new path.

XXII.

THE summer was over. One by one the Ultimates came back to town, greeting one another with such cordiality as Ultimate principles allowed. The restless current of life on street and avenue had shown no apparent diminution in its summer flow; but an added eagerness, a sense of fresh sources of supply, had come with the bright October days and the hints of autumn color in square and park. For Deepmouth, as for Foxgrove, crimson and gold were gone. Leaves had whirled before the wind and drifted into heaps, through which Felix ran with delight. The house was still open; and Lessing came and went, refusing steadily Meg's appeals to be allowed to go back with him.

"It is health that must come before I will have you in your place," he said. "That I have promised to Mrs. Herndon, and it shall be waiting till she is content to say the time is come."

At least it was near. Never, since Meg's girlhood, had such sense of life and vigor filled her. The instinct of her childhood revived; forgotten wood-lore returned, and the children listened with amazement to her quiet stories of what they had summed up collectively as "wild things." Felix watched her jealously. He could follow them only in part; but if he sat close to her, and the rest preserved a respectful distance, made no objections to their being entertained. Save for this, Meg was still silent, answering always more by looks and smiles than in words; but it was a silence losing more and more the

sense of brooding that it had heretofore held. At times the old sombre look showed itself, and she sat with eyes bent on the ground, the old sorrowful question in their dark depths as she looked up. Mrs. Herndon made no comment. Such moods were likely to come; but simple, natural living was their surest antidote. She left her now for longer and longer intervals, finding fresh gain with each return. The excitement of the burglary had long since died away. No trace of the men had been discovered, nor had any further attempts been made in the village where they had become a terror. Three of the children still remained at Foxgrove, left in her charge by Lessing, and accepted as work to be done for him. She had not, like him, an instinctive love of children. Her range was narrow; her affection concentrated on a few: but she sought steadily to follow his leading, and the children accepted her as the next best substitute to be had. There was another reason for delay which Lessing found it hard not to mention. Heilbrun, who had watched with surprised approval his quiet return to accustomed paths, surprised him one night, in the beginning of September, by laying before him a plan for building out a small extension, and thus securing more comfort for all.

"The shop stays," he said sharply. "Work is good, and its symbol honorable. These Americans, with their boast of liberty, scorn to live with their work; but the German has truer sense. The house has space. It can be work-place, and hold more comfort as well. What then? Your face is all one objection."

"Because I like not a murder," Lessing said. "Here is the vine that fifteen years I have seen grow over the windows. How shall we destroy a thing so precious? And it costs you much money, more than is good."

"It is I who know best as to that," Heilbrun answered decisively. "Here I shall stay. I have lease for a lifetime, because I choose to be here, and not tossed always from place to place. You will stay also, and it shall be refuge for many. And for the vine, we shall see to that. Its root is under the window that must be free, and I shall watch the workmen that they do it no harm. There are grapes still: it loves well to give."

The neighbors looked on with interest; for Heilbrun's impatient haste admitted no delay, and the work progressed with a speed in which he found his only compensation for interruption. The vine had been carefully removed by a professional gardener, and lay along the fence, protected by a bulwark of boards, and watched jealously by Lessing.

"Meg shall know nought of it," Heilbrun had said in the beginning; and as Lessing returned from his Sundays at Foxgrove, he asked always with dark suspicion, —

"This time, then, you could keep silence no longer and she knows it all?"

"Not yet," Lessing invariably answered; "I wait till next time." And Heilbrun smiled indulgently and looked again to see if there were any fresh means of hurrying the workmen. At last they were gone, — bricklayers and plasterers, carpenters and plumbers, and all the tribe, and the little extension stood there, fresh and clean; bed and bath room above, sitting-room below, with tiny kitchen opening from it, and, trained about the windows, the old vine and its leafless branches. The partition between Lessing's workroom and what had been Meg's room had been removed. His workbench and tools were near the window; and for the rest of the acquired space, fresh paper and paint, a long table for papers and magazines, a rack at the back for their reception when

other matters were in order, and a dozen or two strong chairs, transformed it into a comfortable and friendly apartment, which gave ample room for such numbers as had been in the habit of coming there. Heilbrun's energies had been given first to this; and he glowed with satisfaction on the first evening that the familiar group assembled there, and in floods of beer devoted it to the claims of universal brotherhood. But there was other work no less important; and he made perpetual excursions to furniture shops, bringing home in person whatever his strength permitted, and putting every article in place with his own hands.

"I will not have old," he protested, as Lessing suggested the second-hand store the block above. "It shall all be new and fresh, and as a woman likes it. They care only for the new. The old has no value; and when it is old furniture that has known many lives, and carries with it who knows what atmosphere of evil and unrest, they are right. Old is a sin, and shall not be. I have my fancies, too," he added, meeting Lessing's surprised eyes.

"But is it not so, women are always in shops seeking the old?"

"Because they have not money for new, and because all women are Jews on one side of their nature, and a bargain is dearer than life. All men are brothers, we say; and that is the Semitic contribution to the common blood. Now, you who have artist eyes may see if I choose the color you will like in carpet, for I know not and care not."

It was useless to oppose; and Lessing yielded to Heilbrun where yielding to another would have been impossible, but shaking his head as the simple ingrain carpets were laid, and the rooms took on habitable shape again. Meg's overwhelming surprise, when at last, on a soft Indian summer day of late November, he brought her home, equalled all that Heilbrun had

desired. He had had fires lighted, and the table spread; and his fierce eyes softened as Felix rushed to him, and threw his arms about his neck, and then spelled out his astonished delight in the changes.

"It is all good, like the great house," he said. "I love you much; you are good."

Meg had flushed deeply as he greeted her.

"It is well you are come at last, Frau Lessing," he said. "Now there will be no more running to and fro, and my Sundays may be in peace. I have lacked it long."

Meg's eyes had filled with tears, and she turned away hastily that Heilbrun might not see them.

"I wish it may be always peace," she said; and Heilbrun retreated, declining to make one at the supper-table. Lessing's face turned toward Meg as she moved about the room which, new as it was, held no sense of strangeness; and he watched her with a deepening sense of comfort and repose. He had not doubted before, but in the partial separation he had seemed to be living two lives, and a shadow lay between him and the possibilities of the new. At last it had lifted. Once more they were together; but now only death could take from him the soul that had grown under his own eyes, and that would walk with him henceforward to the end. He said no word; but as Meg passed him, he rose suddenly and took her into his arms.

"Be happy, Liebchen," he said. "Be happy and quiet, and love will heal all."

Meg's dark eyes looked at him, shyly still,—for this new relation was hardly familiar yet,— but worshipfully. Felix caught her hand jealously, but smiled as Lessing drew him to his knees and held him while Meg went on with her preparations.

"We are all married," he said contentedly, for he had learned the words; and Lessing smiled as he

nodded, and repeated with another look toward Meg, —

"Yes; we are all married."

The Longshores had returned to Newport together, and for a fortnight Bert gave himself up to the familiar methods of enjoyment. The horses had been ordered up, and he drove for hours daily, his wife by his side and looking at him at first in deepest surprise.

"I thought you were never going to care for anything again," she said; "I mean, just as you used to. Now tell me really and truly, does it seem good — just as good as it ever did — to be driving along this avenue when you can't see a beggar nor anything that you've been liking best?"

"I suppose the time will come," Bert Longshore answered resignedly, "in which you may recall the fact that I have stated to you not less than three times a day that I think I enjoy things considerably more than I did, and that I can see no rational reason why I should not. I propose to keep such share of common sense as has been given me, and at present it does not order me to crucify either myself or you. That I want to make a few, whose lives I direct, more comfortable, is only another reason for taking all the pleasure there is to be had out of every-day living."

"Then you 'd dance and all, just the same?"

"Little goose! Why not?"

Mrs. Longshore shook her head.

"I don't see through it," she said. "I thought you were spoiled, but you 're not. I think you 're a great deal better than you were before, and I 'm almost willing to have you pitch your money any way you like. Not quite. I tell you honestly, Bert, it makes me shiver to think of what you have spent this

summer; but I shall stop when I get used to it, I suppose. If you 're so determined to share things, though, I should think you 'd be more particular about the way you let it fly. There won't be anything to share, perhaps. Oh, laugh if you like! You never knew I loved money so, and I don't think I did either. You did n't know I read the stock list every day, and used to wish sometimes that I were a man, and could know just how it felt to make a tremendous venture, and see it turn out just right, and the profits rolling in. Oh! I believe I could be a broker."

"Heaven forbid!" said Mr. Longshore, reining up so suddenly that the horses danced for a moment, and then looked back in surprised remonstrance. "It 's a fair enough occupation as things are," he said, when they had settled again into their long, swinging trot; "but the time will come, Sally, when it will not be any more reputable than that of the hangman is to-day. I have n't ciphered it out, and I don't propose to try at present; but there are plenty of changes to come, and this must be one. Don't worry, child. I have my hands full, and don't think of anything else for now. Do you know, I think the best way for those houses, when they are in decent order, will be to put Miss Biggs in, — give her a couple of rooms, and let her be rent-collector and general overseer. She can't do worse than Meginnis did, and I 'm inclined to think she will do much better."

"Margaret won't spare her. I don't understand in the least, but she is Margaret's right-hand woman."

"She can be her right-hand woman still. Margaret is interested in all these people. We are all working together, Sally, and you will see just how it is when you go back."

Mrs. Longshore sighed a little as she leaned back. If only she too might have been bitten by this mania for altering everything. She had ceased to oppose;

she even shared at moments the eager feeling Bert showed as he pointed out to her how this or that plan was likely to work. Nothing could ever be quite so comfortable again; for if you once allowed the thought to come in, it was impossible not to be continually reminded that the troubles of others must be part of one's own life. But the sharp experience of the month had not been in vain. She must follow Bert if she could; and she shut her eyes and wondered why change seemed so easy for him, so hard for her. At least she had not lost him; and by and by there were reasons that would hold him more firmly to her, and perhaps incline him to take more care of his own. This was her secret; and she smiled as she thought what power it might wield, and then listened contentedly as Bert still talked on, falling at last into silence as they turned toward home. Mr. Jessop had passed him, leaning back luxuriously in his carriage, and bowed with a laugh in his eyes.

"Back to the flesh-pots, after all," he said to himself. "I thought it would n't last. I did him a better turn than he knew, refusing to go into any such fol-de-rol. These young fellows go off on a spurt now and then, but keep a tight hand and they fall in again. Ha, Logan! so you 're here. I missed you."

Mr. Savage Logan in unexceptionable riding costume turned as he heard his name, and rode by the side of the carriage for a time.

"Longshore 's here, after all," Mr. Jessop said presently. "He 's made up his mind how to use his money rationally. I thought he would."

"I think Harkness would hardly agree with you," Mr. Logan said. "He had got matters pretty much into his own hands in that manufacturing matter, and had Lennox flat against the wall, when, presto! your wall opens and shows a treasury vault at the back, and Longshore holding out the key."

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"I mean that Longshore is backing Lennox, and that he is very likely to carry his point. Mrs. Herndon has put in something, too. What Longshore won't, she will."

"The woman's a lunatic. I wish I had the right to put her where she belongs, — under lock and key. I should think Herndon would turn in his grave."

"He would, probably, if he were in one," Mr. Logan said, with a peculiar smile.

"I suppose you mean that the bottom of the bay is too comprehensive to come under that head," Mr. Jessop said irritably. "Logan, I'd give considerable to head Longshore off. He'll do mischief in more ways than one. He never seemed to have brains for anything but business. What's done it? His wife isn't that sort."

"Not at all, but she will follow his lead. I'll give you the details some other time. I think Harkness would like to talk the matter over with you."

"Dine with me to-morrow and bring him," the broker said, after a shrewd look at Mr. Logan's inscrutable face. "There ought to be some method of bringing fools to their senses, and you have dealt with enough to have suggestions for every variety."

Mr. Logan smiled as he rode on, exchanging greetings here and there, and making his own internal comment on one and another as they passed him. Longshore could be crushed by a sufficiently powerful combination, but he was not yet prepared to give his opinion on the advisability of such a course.

Harkness was a successful self-made man, who worshipped his Maker, and regarded opposition to his plans and purposes as a species of blasphemy against the Highest. In a business career of forty years he had cheerfully lost hundreds of thousands of dollars, in fierce and determined contest with his many

laborers. Labor was a commodity; and he dealt with it as with other commodities, crushing out any attempt at assertion of rights, or the endeavor to prove that as the conditions of success had altered methods must also alter. Like the mass of successful middle-aged Americans, he found it impossible to take in the startling magnitude of the changes in the very foundations of industrial life.

Kind-hearted, personally, where his will was not crossed, he looked with an indignation bordering on fury on any capitalist who gave place to theories, and accepted the new conditions as legitimate and to be encouraged. Labor organizations of whatever nature roused him to instant anathema. He had crushed out, he supposed, the silly attempt of this young Lennox, who, without capital, had sought to rival him, the original founder of this very industry, and had turned purple with rage, as Mr. Savage Logan, his legal adviser, communicated the information he had received. Lennox, so far from being crushed, was more defiant than ever. His goods were underselling those of the firm of Harkness & Co., and public attention had been called to their surprising excellence.

"I'd even go in for a model village, blast 'em!" Mr. Harkness said, stamping about the office, and sitting down suddenly as he felt Mr. Logan's cold eyes searching him. "Tie things up tight so 't the fools can't get ahead of you. Keep 'em from owning; and I ain't sure but a model village would be the best way to circumvent him. I'm against a workman's owning land. It upsets him; makes him airish, and more ready to strike. Keep wages where they belong, and he can't own. This Longshore ought to be locked up. Suppose it is n't but eighty men. The effect is just as bad as if it were eight hundred or eight thousand. There 's just one way.

Combination, — yes, sir, combination. It is the business of the capitalist to suppress small ventures, and I 'll do it, sir, if it takes the last dollar I 've got."

"You began with a small capital yourself, did you not?"

"The times were different then," Mr. Harkness said, looking with sudden suspicion at his lawyer's face. "I had just forty dollars, sir, when I started my forge, and my brother went in with me. I could n't do to-day what I did then, — in other words, I could n't start a young man out, with as fair a chance of succeeding, on less than a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. I admit frankly that this is the case. But I don't want to start anybody out. Let the young men go into the big concerns, and let whatever is started anywhere be a branch of these concerns. See here, Logan, this fellow might be coaxed if he won't be driven. I 'll make him an offer, — fair terms, too, — to go in with us. I 've tried the bluff game; now I 'll try the other."

Mr. Jessop had expressed himself as willing to aid in breaking up Longshore's plans, should a way open, and at various times in September and October Mr. Logan had had interviews with Lennox and at last with Mr. Longshore himself, who had avoided the necessity as long as possible. Mr. Logan approached him skilfully as the friend of Lennox, who could certainly not wish to stand in the way of his making a still more profitable arrangement than the present one.

It was stupid enough in Longshore to have brought Lennox along, still more stupid to have as hearer this Strothers, who was known to be a very good doctor, but no business man; and at intervals he turned toward him slightly, a little uncomfortable at the silence preserved. For Dr. Strothers was interested unquestionably, and listened with singular and quite inexplicable attention to every point made, and he

even smiled once or twice at Mr. Longshore's impetuous answers.

"The amount of it is, then, you refuse absolutely to have anything to do with the matter!" Mr. Logan said suavely, but with the sharp, metallic distinctness in every syllable that, to the ear familiar with his inflections, denoted mischief.

"Absolutely," Mr. Longshore said, rising cheerfully and beginning to put on his gloves.

"You are missing a chance. You could build up a colony on your own ground or on Harkness's. He has no objection to its being a branch affair, but he would prefer having it all one concern. He will go in for reform, too, and give you as much model village as you want."

"I want nothing to do with your model village," said Mr. Longshore, calmly. "Lennox is n't a baron of the Middle Ages, nor am I; and I'm not disposed to try and fill the rôle."

"I fail to follow you," said Mr. Logan, stiffly.

"The feudal system did its work in feudal times," Lennox said. He had been silent also, as if by preconcerted plan; but now he rose so suddenly that Mr. Logan started. "I have yet to see natural republican life in one of these model villages. The administration is purely feudal. In the one you have cited as example it is practically a despotism, — very kind, very thoughtful, — giving much, asking little; but how does it end? Does the workman own his home when old age comes? Are the hours shortened that he may have time for some chance of education and development? Are his children's chances any better than his own? Not one whit. He owns no foot of ground; he has no reserve fund for old age; and when his strength as producer fails, he is turned out to make room for the stronger comer. All justice is made a favor. You are heard, not because you are a

man with a man's rights, but because the management has elected to be kind, and considers it the true policy. It is all kind, — all very philanthropic, apparently; but it is simply a scheme for making contented workmen, and, therefore, better rates of interest on the capital invested. In your dealings with me you have looked upon me apparently as a dreamer, one of whose missions is to make the rich give up their wealth to the poor. On the contrary, I desire but one thing, — that the poor shall be placed in such a situation as will enable them to create new wealth for themselves. In our village every man may own his house in the end if he will, and have it intact, with no forcing into community life and no pooling of earnings or savings. The independence we want for ourselves must be his also; and to know what it means, he must be taught by patient, long-continued lessons. Perpetual progress must be for him as well as for us, and the law of life demands that the stronger shall make the way plain for the weaker."

"You may find unexpected obstacles to your Utopia," Mr. Logan said, with a hardly veiled sneer, as Lennox checked himself suddenly and looked toward Mr. Longshore.

"It is no Utopia; it is the future as we may make it," Lennox returned, bowing gravely; and the three left the office.

"It's a waste of words," Lennox said regretfully, as they threaded their way down Nassau Street. "I have to take the three-o'clock train, Longshore, for a man is to be there who hints a big order."

"The more the merrier. Look for me to-morrow," Mr. Longshore answered, as Lennox turned away, his cheeks still flushed with excitement.

"It is a waste of words," Dr. Strothers said. "That man is steel, — your Logan, with his deep plans and far-seeing methods. Like Jerry, I am certain that

labor in this life is absolutely wasted on certain types. What he calls 'a steady-goin', dyed-in-the-grain bummer,' is past being reached by man, and must be left to the invisible powers; and there are men, like your Harkness or Logan, so incased in prejudices, so dead to all real progress, that words are mere pea-shooters against a wall of adamant. In fact, there is no armament on this side strong enough to make a breach. The man himself must be reconstructed, and for that one must wait."

"I could n't face Logan in an argument," Longshore said, after a pause for consideration. "You and Frank are ahead of me, too. But I see that the matter comes within business lines, and I know that it 's reason and justice, and so I shall back him with all the money that is necessary; and if Harkness combines, I 'll combine too, if there 's anybody in New York man enough to see the rights of it and not afraid of a fight. He is n't needed yet, but he may be." And Mr. Longshore fell into a brown study as the coupé jolted up Broadway.

"There is a man who might be induced to combine," Dr. Strothers said presently. "He has indefinite piles of money; and though his chief interest is medals, it is because he has never been stirred to anything else. He has also a lively and well-developed hatred of self-made men, always excepting Lincoln, and declared to my rather astonished ears, the other evening, that the energy and ability manifested by the tribe were no compensation for their hardness, their intolerance, and their contempt for all who had not come up after their methods. Harkness fills this bill entirely."

"You can't mean little Hammersmith!" Mr. Longshore exclaimed. "My dear Strothers, he holds each dollar with its own separate pair of pincers. He spends for nothing but his own fancies."

"Doctors get at strange secrets. I happen to know that he spends for many things beside his own fancies. He has even given money to Jerry."

"Jerry? Jerry?" Mr. Longshore repeated. "Who is this Jerry you are quoting?"

"A man I want you to see before the winter ends. You will not believe in his methods, perhaps, but he impresses me as very remarkable, — as remarkable as Lessing, in another fashion. Suppose we make up a party some evening, and go down."

Mr. Longshore nodded, still preoccupied with his surprise, as Dr. Strothers jumped out, and ran up his steps. He had given up the daily hospital attendance, his private practice having so increased that full attention to both was impossible, and he had followed an impulse to-day in going down with Longshore for this interview with Logan. Should he follow another now, and go round to the quiet house on Stuyvesant Square? He looked at his watch. It was four o'clock, and the short November day passing even now into twilight.

"To know definitely will be a blessing," he said, half aloud. "I am growing useless to myself and of small account for the rest of mankind, and I am sworn to wait till that wretched anniversary is past. If it were not for that, I should tempt fate to-night."

The bell rang as he stood there, and he smiled, and laid down the hat he had taken up. "Fate has more discretion than I," he thought, "and will see that I commit no imprudence at present. I hope it is as visitor, and not as patient, that you are here," he said, going forward, as the door opened, and shaking hands cordially with Mr. Featherstone, whose face gave no hint of summer rest, but was even more wan than when he had left town in early July.

"A combination," was the answer. "The last because I promised my wife, and the first because I

wanted to see you after these months. You were not at the Hall last Sunday?"

"No, I was not."

"I asked because, if there, you would have noticed, I think, what no one else seems to have done, — a long pause just before the end of my sermon. In that pause I saw not only the points of colored light that have been before my eyes for a long time when speaking, but a space suddenly filled with a sea of white light, in which my congregation were lost. I ended somehow, and got to my chair; but my head seemed to be sending off a series of small detonations, like the sort of crackling one hears when a cold wind strikes suddenly on red-hot metal. It was not vertigo. What was it?"

"It was a sign that even you can hardly afford to disregard," Dr. Strothers said, his compassionate eyes looking into the weary face turned toward him. "You have come to the end of your strength, and work is over till you have accumulated a new capital."

"And suppose I cannot stop, — that going on and living are to me synonymous?"

"That will not alter the fact. Paralysis is at the door, or something even worse; but it is not too late to dismiss the dreadful guest, if you will. When have you rested? Not this year, or any year since I have known you. You have finished a book this summer?"

"That is my rest; a change of work, and all I have ever needed."

"And a legitimate enough method if you had dropped work when over, and lived much out of doors. Instead, in your walk or drive it was always with you. Your burdens are not on your back, — out of sight and thus much more bearable, — but about your neck and always under your eyes. Now, let me ask you some questions."

He sat silent when they had ended, and there was no reassurance in his face when he finally spoke.

"The framework is well enough. Food and drink, hours, all that sort of thing seems well adjusted. It is not so much overwork as unrest. What you require is a quiet mind, a dismissal of care and apprehension. You are not at rest, and mind is too strong for body, and will end in forsaking it unless a change comes."

"The change can come in but one way," Mr. Featherstone said, after a moment in which he met the young man's look with one full of an imperative question and demand. "Strothers, you incline me always to trust you and speak freely. My work is a failure. These years of labor have not one result of good for a human soul. I have destroyed; but in spite of my best effort, I have never been able to build. I look at my people Sunday after Sunday. They have not grown. They are harder, more critical; less and less inclined to faith in anything but themselves. There are noble souls among them, but to give out to others any of the warmth they really own is less and less possible. It has never seemed so clear to me as this afternoon. I have been talking with Mrs. Herndon; and she has told me how her own mind has worked, and how small comfort purely ethical teaching has long had for her. And as it happens, I have had a talk also with a man who has interested me from the beginning, — this Lessing the carver, who is certainly also Lessing the scholar. You know him, I find?"

"Very well. He is a rare soul."

"He, too, has told me some of his mental processes," Mr. Featherstone went on. "By different lines he has come to the same result, but more fully than she. For both, for every true soul that I find and that dares to speak, love has come to be the one fact of the universe. I have made it law; but to

him love and law are one, and the world's work can be done only through love. To my people this is moonshine and madness. They may agree to it for a moment as a fine poetical conception; but to live it is another matter, and I have no words that will persuade them. I hardly know myself what I want, but one thing is becoming clear. I must leave this platform from which I would seem to have taught repulsion rather than combination, and seek a life in which my shortcomings need harm no one but myself. Understand me," he went on, speaking with sudden almost fierce energy; "I deny nothing that I have affirmed. I have given the truth in such measure as its face was plain to me, and another may speak the same message and find life and warmth answering to his word. But so far as I can see," and he smiled faintly, "my teaching has been of the boomerang order, and returned inevitably upon myself, no lodgement for it in any mind save my own."

"Rest and change will give you new heart," Dr. Strothers said. "Take a vacation. Drop preaching and thinking, and go abroad for a year. You will need to have immediate change, else you will be struck down and find change impossible. And do not forget that you are beloved and honored by many whom you have helped, and of whom I am one. You made me weigh and measure and sift, and in time I found out what to reject and what to keep."

"The rest have kept nothing. They affirm that there is nothing to be kept. How have you?"

"Certainly not by pure reason, but something indefinable but sure. Like Lessing, I believe in Love, — Divine Love, that guides the world in its course and cares for sparrow as truly as for human soul. It is not to be argued or proved in any mere words. It must be lived, and with faith that it will come it is already here."

"Mysticism," Mr. Featherstone said, a little drearily. "Unreason. Suppose yourself deluded, and that the Unknowable remains the Unknowable?"

"There is no delusion. Life may still prove that to you," Dr. Strothers said. "Follow my prescription. Rest heartily and lovingly, not grudgingly, and we will see."

The pale eyes had lost their hardness and smiled with the lips, as the minister took the speaker's hand and looked at him earnestly. "I shall see you again," he said; "you do me good." And he made his way out.

Dr. Strothers went to the window and watched him out of sight, — the tall, slender, swift-moving figure that gave no outward token of impending danger. The bell had rung as he stood there, and for an hour he gave himself to the work of the office; dining abstractedly when it had ended, and after a few minutes over the evening paper, and a look at the clock, hurrying on his overcoat.

"There is no patient this evening," he said, "and perhaps she may feel like the excursion to-night. 'That not impossible she,'" he added with a smile as he ran down the steps, and in a few minutes had rung the bell at Mrs. Herndon's door.

XXIII.

"I AM thinking over a very singular proposition," Mrs. Herndon said, as Dr. Strothers entered the library, "and I am glad you have come, for I want your opinion about it."

Dr. Strothers seated himself silently and looked at her. He was hardly the confidant she would choose regarding a marriage proposition; but the word had given him a distinct shock, and its effect was perceptible.

"You have been working very hard," Mrs. Herndon said suddenly. "I ought to have noticed it at once. You are really pale."

"The room is warm, and I have been walking fast."

"In that case you should be flushed."

"It is nothing, in any case," he said. "Now tell me about this — proposition."

"It is Mr. Featherstone — and you have seen him too," she interrupted herself as his face changed. "I wonder if he has been talking to you about it. He was profoundly interested in all I told him about Meg and Lessing. He had gone to Lessing's to leave an order, and fell into conversation with him. He wants that the Ultimates should meet here the first week in December, — their second meeting, — and that I should have Lessing here, — Lessing, and Herbert Longshore, and perhaps even Heilbrun. He fancies that an interest may be aroused in practical questions, and thus Mr. Chichester Kirk's theories of decoration be allowed to slumber this winter. For my own

part, you know, I had said good-by to the Ultimates, and I cannot in the least feel sure if it is worth while to bring such alien elements together. Indeed, to have Lessing hurt would seem to me almost a profaning of the mysteries."

Dr. Strothers pondered a moment.

"It will do no harm; it may do a deal of good," he said presently. "I would have them here by all means. By that time your cousins will be here again, will they not? It will interest Miss Marcia."

"They will come a day or two before Christmas. You have an expectant air, and are still holding your hat. What is it? The Mission? Your Jerry will begin to think you one of his converts. Is this the third and last time of asking?"

"I wish it were," Dr. Strothers said, under his breath; but she had caught the words, and colored high.

"I will go," she said, after an instant's hesitation, as if to go were a safer course than to remain in the quiet library; and she left the room.

"I'm a fool! a double-twisted, ridiculous fool!" Dr. Strothers said, as he marched up and down; and he was still pronouncing like judgments upon himself when she returned.

"Then you have really come to have faith in this man and his methods?" she asked, as they walked over to the "Elevated" station.

"Full faith in the man, and faith in his methods for the class he deals with. It is only another application of this law of love as a working force for the world. Neither you nor I are obliged to believe in the Christ that he presents. We know the Father, and this son of man whom they call Son of God has no office save as he shows the love of the Father. But for these men, sunk in every form of sin, embruted, sodden, there is no other redemption. Ethical

methods are useless. The Christ who died for love of man is the only power that can stir them, and the name makes no difference. It is the same spirit at work. Don't look at it with any prejudice, but take whatever comes naturally. I shall be curious to know what impression remains."

"A mixture of comedy and tragedy, judging from the specimens you offered us last summer," Mrs. Herndon said, as they left the car and passed under the great pier of the East River Bridge. She drew nearer her companion as sounds of dance and fiddle and coarse merriment sounded from the houses opposite the Mission, which they had reached in but a moment's walk. The meeting had not opened formally, but the men were singing the hymn best beloved of all the little collection, —

> "We 're going home, no more to roam,
> No more to sin and sorrow;"

and as head and feet accented the rhythm the visitors took places part-way up the aisle.

"Properly, you should be taken to the platform with the other visitors; but in that case you could not watch Jerry's face," Dr. Strothers whispered. "There he comes, and that is his wife with him."

Mrs. Herndon's eyes were fixed on the pair, turning at last from McAuley, who had seated himself quietly in the arm-chair facing the audience and taken the hymn-book a man held out, and resting on the woman who had entered with him, and whose wide tender gray eyes, and sweet, serious face framed in the close bonnet, might have belonged to some Quaker preacher or Sister of Mercy. The man could have no such stuff in him; and again she looked at the powerful, long-limbed figure, — the broad shoulders and great hands, the head, with its retreating

forehead, deep-set eyes, and projecting nose, the wide mouth and feeble chin.

"Plainly he is from the slums," she thought, "but this woman can have known them only as he dragged her there;" and she watched her with always increasing interest. The meeting had begun as she looked and wondered. She knew the order; for Dr. Strothers had described it more than once, giving renderings of the different speakers. McAuley rose slowly when the reading ended, straightened his long limbs, and looked about — a keen, sagacious, yet gentle look, into which there came a glint of humor as some sudden thought struck him. What he said hardly varied from the form which Dr. Strothers had given them on the piazza at Foxgrove; but about that had been a sense of unreality, while for this no such thought was possible. The man was tremendously in earnest; and as he spoke the face lighted, the deep-set eyes glowed, and a smile inexpressibly sweet and tender glorified the coarse features. There was even a certain distinction in the quiet, unconscious bearing. It was easy to see that he would be master here, easy to guess what power had drawn the woman; but as he ended, with his call for testimonies, — "Come, now, — no spinning; knock off both ends and give us the middle," — Margaret looked with incredulity too deep for words at the wife, who had stepped forward quietly, and spoke now in a voice sweet and tender as her face: —

"What he says I might say too. I've been through it all, and in my worst drunken fits — and I drank all the time — there was a power that could save me even then. I was so lost and far down I don't want to think of it. I couldn't speak of it if I didn't mean you should know that this dear, tender Saviour goes seeking that which is lost. He found me; and to-day all I want in the world is to make every one

know his power, and have the peace and comfort I have every hour of my life. There's many of you here can say the same."

Two or three rose at once, but gave way to a woman, who stretched out her arms as if she would embrace them all; a rotund little figure wrapped in a blanket shawl. The face was Jewish, and the words came in strong accent of the German Jew: —

"I bless Gott dat ever I come here. Oh, my tear friends, how vill I tell you how vicked I vas! So vicked! I schvear, und tell lies, und haf such a demper, I trow de dishes at mine husband vhen he come to eat. Und I hated Christians. I say dey should be killed, efery von. I would hurt dem if I could. Von time a Bible reader is come und gif me ein Bible. Vhen I see dat New Testament I am mad, und I schvear. I begin den mit my fingers, und efery day I pinch out de name of Jesus. It take a good vhile. Efery day I must read so as to see de name of Jesus, an' efery day I pinch him out. Den, at last it is all out und I am glad, und I show eferybody und I laugh. Oh, vhat shame it makes me now to see dat Bible so! Den my husband is run away an' leaf me an' de five children, an' dere is not work enough, an' ve go hungry. I vas in such drouble! Und one day mine neighbor comes und she say: 'Come mit me; I go to a nice place.' All de time I remember some words I read in dat Testament, an' dey sticks to me. So I come, but I say, 'I am a Jew; I like not to come.' Dere vas a man, an' he say he be a Jew too, an' I could shpit on him; but den I begins to gry, I feels so queer, an' den some one say: 'Come, it von't hurt you to be prayed for;' but I say, 'Got avay mit you; I vill not.' But I keep comin'. It is good, und at last I did understand, an' I pray an' beg eferybody pray. Oh, my sins are so big! How shall I lose dose sin? I vant to lose dem. I vant to love Jesus! I keep

praying, an' in von day dey are all gone! Oh, I am so happy! You vill not believe. I do not even vant to schvear any more; no, not any more. I do not even vant to holler an' be mad; no, not any more. I do not vant to tell lies; no, not any more. Gott is so goot to me. Und it is a goot vhile; oh, a long vhile! It is two year. I could not be vicked any more. Oh, pray for me und help me to be good!"

The heavy face was radiant as she sat down, wiping away the tears, and turned toward a haggard-looking man of perhaps thirty-five, who had sprung to his feet.

"There's nobody in a bigger hurry to tell their story than me," he said. "An' it always begins the same way, — God bless the Water Street Mission! I was a drunkard, the worst kind. My children would 'a' starved but for the neighbors — four children, an' barely rags to cover 'em, an' them an' me wife barefoot in the cold winter weather. I 'd been on a spree a fortnight whin I come in here to hear a song. A man that's here to-night invited me in to hear a song, an' whin I went out I hated that man fit to crack his head for him. But somehow I come back an' kept a-comin'. God's Sperrit followed me up close an' tight. Then I moved, an' me wife says: 'You 'd better stay where you are. 'Folks know you here; but if you go anywhere else, they 'll all be pointin' at your naked young ones.' I felt bad. I says: 'I 'm goin' to the devil in this rum-hole, an' I won't stay no longer.' I went to a new place, but spreed worse 'n ever. At last I give in. I went up to that bench an' knelt down, a dirty, nasty drunkard, an' prayed to be made clean. That was ten months ago. To-night I *am* clean. My children 's got decent clothes an' a bed — the first bed in their lives! I met a man as I come along that used to sell me whiskey. 'Hallo, Sam!' says he; 'you 've turned

soft. Jerry McAuley on the brain!' 'Yes,' says I. 'I suppose it is soft to keep my money to feed my own children instead o' feedin' yours.' 'Oh, dry up!' says he, an' went off. I 've run over the minute. I ax your pardon all round."

"I tell you," said a small, alert man, who had been standing waiting for his turn, "I 've got plenty to say, an' no mind to keep back a word of it, if I had time for the whole, which there ain't. What I 'm goin' to say is, tobacco was my stumblin'-block. Jerry 's right, every time, when he says we 'd all better give it up. There I was, after I was converted, knocked off liquor, but held on like a barnacle to my tobacco. Chew an' smoke, smoke an' chew, an' then spit! Why, you 'd think I 'd a *pond* o' spit in me the way it squirted! An' that thirsty! Drink the river dry an' never know I 'd had enough. But I knew it was a nasty habit. I got sick o' workin', standin' in a puddle o' tobacco juice, an' I tried to stop. Could n't stop. Knocked off an' begun agin worse 'n ever. Then I prayed, an' got you all to pray; an' it was like drawin' teeth, but the Lord took away the appetite, for I went down to the dock an' chucked in my tobacco, pipe an' all, an' from that hour to this — two year an' more — I hain't touched it. Glory be to God, he saves from all them sins. I 've got enough now to keep me busy, but I hain't no more trouble from tobacco."

"If heaven had cost me five dollars, I could n't 'a' got there," said a young man with twinkling blue eyes, and a face very red with embarrassment, but very determined to speak out. "I was that ragged an old-clothes man would n't 'a' bid on me; no, nor a rag-picker taken me up on his hook; but here I am. Oh, I tell ye, anybody can be saved. I said I could n't; I was too far gone; but here I am, clean an' decent, an' good clothes, too. There 's some here

that think they can't be saved. You can. Jesus took hold o' me an' dragged me out, and he 'll drag you. Reach out your hand an' see if he won't."

"You may be dead certain o' that," said another voice, — a slender, delicate young man, who looked hardly more than a lad. "There 's plenty here know how I came in here eleven months ago, the wretchedest man ever you see. It was n't for want of money, either. I had $300 in my pocket. This was what the matter was: I was dead sick of sin, an' I did n't know how to stop. I was sent up to Sing Sing when I was n't but seventeen, for a burglary, an' I 'd just come out from a seven years' term. I was one o' the tough cases, an' I 'd been punished till I was that ugly I 'd 'a' killed them keepers with a good will. I cracked a place not long after I come out, an' this money was from that; but I did n't want to run any more risks, an' I come down to Jerry to see if he thought there 'd be a chance for honest work. I could n't get it alone. Oh, how my heart ached, I was so tired o' being knocked round. I 'd been on the street since I was four years old, all owin' to drink in the family — father and mother an' all. I had n't never drunk, I hated it so, smell an' all; but I 'd done everything else. Jerry asked me to kneel down, an' prayed I might be honest, but it was n't till that stolen money was gone, and I stood up and confessed right here what I 'd been, an' told you what I meant to try to be, that I got peace. God knows I was honest, an' Jesus saved me then, an' to-day there ain't a happier man in New York. I 've got a good home — the first I ever had, an' I 'm that full o' thankfulness, day an' night, I can't keep still hardly."

Experiences followed fast, a verse of a hymn sung now and then, but the story the same for all. Drunkards, gamblers, thieves, prostitutes, bearing small

trace of the wretched lives far behind them. Peace, quiet content, bubbling-over happiness, were in the faces; and the ragged wretches near the door, who had dropped in one by one, listened with wondering intentness. Long ago Mrs. Herndon had forgotten to be critical, and watched with absorbed eagerness for what might come next. McAuley had risen and looked down to the door.

"There 's men here to-night," he said, "that mind me more than ever of the mean, miserable rag-bag of a man that I was eleven years ago. I had n't a home nor a friend. I was down in the mud an' not a soul to care till this blessed Jesus picked me up. You men, your hearts ache the way mine did. You 'd turn round if you knew how. Don't you know Jesus is waitin' for every one o' you? Oh, won't you come up here an' be prayed for?"

One after another they came up slowly and reluctantly. The people had risen and were singing, "This loving Saviour stands patiently," and the refrain sounded full and clear, —

> "Calling now to thee, prodigal,
> Calling now to thee;
> Thou hast wandered far away,
> But he 's calling now to thee."

There was silence. Some invisible presence seemed to hover over them as McAuley said low, "Let these poor souls pray for themselves;" and one of the roughest-looking of the men burst into tears and sobbed, —

"Oh, Jesus, you know all about it. I'm sick of my sins. I want to be decent. You can help me. Oh, don't let me get into the mud again!"

Seven men, straight from the slums! Could any power redeem them from the miserable years, the brutish lives, the rags, the foulness of soul and body?

Yet this man who bent over them, his face glorified with the love that filled it, had known it all, and by the power of that knowledge drew them on. No tenderer soul had ever looked on human pain ; and as one by one the men told low what they had resolved, there was only a murmured "Thank God" from those who suffered like them. Tears flowed unheeded as she listened, nor had the spell passed when the meeting ended and McAuley came toward them, putting out his hand with a questioning look.

"It 's Mrs. Herndon, who has been Meg's friend," Dr. Strothers said ; and McAuley shook his head.

"Then you 're one I 'm to go for," he said, smiling, but with a reproachful look. "If you 'd had love strong in you for Him who saves, you could n't have let her go without tellin' her. Come here oftener, an' maybe you 'll get to see what it means. I 'll not blame you, for maybe you 've had no one to say it to you. There 's plenty of up-town sinners that know no more than the man out o' the gutter down here, though it 's hard to see how it can be. Will you come again ?"

It was impossible to take offence, and equally impossible not to say, "Yes, surely," with something of the heartiness of the invitation. She was silent as they passed slowly out, the men pausing at the door to shake hands with Mrs. McAuley, who had taken her place there, and was listening to one and another bit of confidence. Mrs. Herndon took the extended hand and looked at her earnestly.

"I want to understand," she said, "how it is that these terrible lives have left no trace."

"Because the Lord wipes out the lines," was the instant answer. "Come often enough to watch these poor souls that went up for prayers to-night, and you 'll see them go. When they have loved long enough there won't be one left. He would n't believe,

either," she added, turning to Dr. Strothers; "but he 's been here so much he is beginning to now. He 'll be one of us in the Lord's time."

"I am one of you now."

"Ah, but in your own way; an' a good way, that seems so much like the Lord's that it deceives your own self. But you don't believe the best thing of all, an' it 's got to come to you. It will, too. You 're the Lord's own, and his hand is on you."

"It is because I believe in 'the best thing of all' that I come at all," Dr. Strothers said, as they passed out and went toward the station. "Is it like what I told you?"

"Yes, but far more real. I could not have believed that it could all seem so simple and natural to me. Impossible, of course, for a higher type. No one could turn out their inmost self in public who had not lived in public, but for them it seems the only way. And what stories! Do you suppose there are — there must be — frauds among them?"

"Here and there, but an astonishingly small proportion. McAuley's insight and instinct are like a lightning flash; a fraud has no chance. You will want to go again?"

"Most certainly; though, as I think of it, it might become monotonous after a time."

"I thought so, but it does not; partly because there are always fresh cases, and so fresh experiences, and partly because McAuley himself is always surprising you with some flash of wit or unexpected turn of thought. I was very curious to know if this business of saving went any farther than the emotional crisis you saw to-night, and if they held on and were turned into decent citizens. There is no question about it. They are made over. I have been watching one or two emerge, from rags and filth and the horrors of these rum-holes and the tenements

over them, into order and cleanliness and a fair show of comfort. He has the secret of reform."

"But does it go any farther than a clutch at personal salvation? Do you suppose, for instance, that any of them could understand Lessing's work, or realize his self-sacrifice or his hopes?"

"Hardly, for the most of them. McAuley could, up to a certain point; but would consider it vitiated by his want of faith in certain dogmas. I have talked with him of this question of labor and wages, and he sums it up in his own fashion. 'If the man that hires is a real Christian, out an' out,' he says, 'and the man that 's hired is another, there 'll be no fight. The boss 'll want to pay fair an' give a chance, an' the workman will see that there 's no shirking. Convert 'em all, an' you 'll see no more strikes nor bother.' It is Lessing's principle in another form. To love your brother man will mean justice, and till love comes to its own, injustice sits on the throne. They are nearer than they think."

The train had been delayed; and as they stood on the platform, the great pier rising shadowy and grim before them, a woman's sharp scream arose above the jingle of pianos and squeak of fiddles, sounding out shrilly, again and again. A policeman moved leisurely down the street, and pushed aside the crowd gathered in front of the house, too well used to such summons to consider haste of any importance; and Mrs. Herndon shuddered as she entered the car.

"How is it that the decent ones are content to stay among such horrors?" she said.

"They were born among them, to begin with; and now, though they know something better, they live here, as McAuley does, to save as many as they can. It is a saving from hell, but not the hell that he has in mind. This is where Meg spent those first years. She is as much a miracle as McAuley's wife, — another

proof that whatever grip heredity may have, it can be persuaded to relax it. McAuley has a theory based on his own rendering of the word, 'The truth shall make you free.' He insists that this is not, as ministers have it, the general truth of the New Testament revelation, but such truth as you heard to-night. 'The Judgment Day won't give you much chance o' coverin' up. It 'll be plain enough then, what you 've been. Now, you make a clean breast of it right here. Tell the meanest thing there is, an' don't you hold back a word, an' the truth *shall* make you free! Your chains are knocked off, that minute you own up, an' the doors open for peace to come in.' There is common sense in it, is n't there? I am beginning to believe that nothing is impossible."

Mrs. Herndon's attention had evidently wandered; and she met his eyes with a look over which he pondered, and which remained with him long after they had said good-night.

"Nothing impossible?" she had repeated vaguely, and then roused. "That is a comfortable theory; but in spite of it, there are one or two things that remain so."

She hesitated as her foot touched the stairs, then went into the library.

"I shall want you to take this letter out to the box as soon as it is written," she said to Simmons; and she sighed with relief as she handed him presently the hurried lines which read: —

"If you can come to me at once, dear cousin Marcia, it will be the greatest favor I can ask. For many reasons it is not best for me to be here alone, and there is no one I want so much as you. Arrange, if possible, to be here this week."

A singular fatality attended all Dr. Strothers's visits that week. He had grown accustomed to running in

almost at will; and as Simmons said regretfully, day after day, "Miss Margaret done gone out, sir," he began to wonder if it were not deliberate plan rather than accidental happening. Perhaps he deserved it; and if she meant him to understand that his presence was unnecessary, and the hopes that lately he had hardly sought to conceal presumptuous, this might be for both the easiest method of emphasizing the fact. On Monday evening they had gone to the Mission, and on Friday Herbert Longshore ran into the office on his way down town, to say that they were all going to hear the new light that evening, and hoped that Dr. Strothers would dine with them and make one of the party.

"With pleasure," Dr. Strothers said eagerly, and then wished the words unsaid. He had made up his mind what words their next interview must hold, and till these words were spoken, to see her with others would mean only fresh addition to the uncertainty that tormented him. Saturday ended the year since Mr. Herndon's fate had been definitely decided, and gave him the right to speak which he had heretofore denied himself. It was impossible but that she knew his thought, and there had been moments when it seemed certain that time would make it not unwelcome; but now repulse was quite as possible as consent. But he could take nothing for granted. There must be full speech between them; understanding as absolute as words had power to give, and if she had put love out of her life, at least such friendship as had been theirs from the beginning. A miserable restlessness dominated him, in spite of resolution, forcing him into uneasy retrospect, — a summing up of looks and words and tones; a conviction that he had filled them with a meaning born of his own desire, and that mere kindliness and a faith to old memories had been her sole reason for

such friendship as she had shown. A patient detained him at the last moment, and he had sent up Michael with a message of regret, saying that he would join them later in the evening if possible. A sudden summons prevented this, and he was absorbed that night and for many hours the next day in one of the sharpest struggles with death that his experience had brought him, turning away at last triumphant, but wellnigh as exhausted as the man who lay there, pallid and speechless, but with returning life in his eyes. He had neglected every one else, and after a bath and a few minutes' rest, hastened to make his round of visits. This evening must settle the tormenting question; but he forced himself to the work of the hour, congratulating himself that no blunder had resulted from the distracted mind, unsuspected behind the quiet face. The house was lighted more than usual as he crossed the Square. Possibly the Longshores were there, for Sally was not content if a day passed without meeting. She had been ordered to keep early hours, and he could easily outstay her; and he set his lips firmly as he resolved that no combination of circumstances should balk him. Simmons's face beamed as he opened the door.

"It 's ole times come ag'in," he said. "Dey 'll be powerful glad to see you, sir. It 's de ole ladies, done come dis yer afternoon, when I was n't lookin' for 'em nohow. In de librerry, sir, same 's ever."

Miss Erminia rushed forward ecstatically as he entered.

"Now, this is truly delightful," she said. "The first one to come; and you did n't expect us so soon, did you? If Margaret had n't insisted so, we should have waited a week; but the child could not stand it here alone, and just begged and prayed us to come straight on. Such changes! To think of Meg!"

And Miss Erminia continued to flutter and pour out a flood of opinions and conjectures as Miss Marcia came forward. She had aged perceptibly, and Dr. Strothers looked at her with a sudden sense that she was really an old lady, and frailer than he had thought. She was his friend, and if necessary he would tell her the whole and enlist her in his service; and he turned with a sense almost of indignation toward Margaret, whose eyes were bright and whose expression indicated a sense of safety as well as triumph. Very evidently he must wait; but his will became even stronger as he saw the settled purpose to give him no opening. The "masterful look" Miss Biggs had commented upon was in his eyes; but he chatted on, listening at last to her report of the evening before, and smiling at Miss Marcia's disturbed look.

"My dear Margaret!" she said; "you can't mean that you really take any pleasure in this ranting Methodism."

"You shall go yourself, Cousin Marcia, and be converted on the spot, — not to Methodism or any other ism, but to faith in the man."

Miss Marcia listened incredulously, privately affirming her fixed resolution not to be led into strange paths; but Miss Erminia hailed with delight the possibilities of a new sensation, and nodded with satisfaction as her questions revealed the fact that nothing could be more unpleasant than the location, or more objectionable than the people who inhabited it.

"If it had not been impossible, I should say that I saw Meg there last night," Mrs. Herndon said, as toward the end of the evening Dr. Strothers crossed the room and stood by her.

"Meg!" he said, for the moment turned aside from his intention. "It is impossible now, I should say. I want you —"

Mrs. Herndon had moved away, even as he spoke, to slip a cushion behind Miss Marcia's back; and after a moment or two of waiting, he bade them good-night, and went away drearily. It was plain enough that she meant to give him no chance, but chance should come; and he went moodily to bed, to dream that he had been appointed surgeon to a North Pole expedition, and that from the first iceberg they encountered looked out the face of Mrs. Herndon, serene and triumphant, her fortress no colder than her heart. Through many forms the same face led him on, always eluding and always with the same serene smile; and he woke with the eyes still before him, and a determination to make them hold another look, if words of his had power to bring it. She was no less cordial, but she was never alone; and though tempted sometimes to write, he had resolved that speech alone should answer him, and watched with an eager persistency for any shadow of opening. December had come. The evening for the meeting of the Ultimates was near at hand. Mr. Featherstone had spent more than one hour in the office questioning his modes of thought, listening gravely to his experience at the Mission, and looking at him with a certain wonder as the talks ended.

"You have a curiously universal sympathy," he said one day. "I sympathize theoretically, and now and then in my life have been deeply moved, as you know, by causes. But it is the cause, not the individual, that stirs me; and all this personal misery and personal experience has even a revolting side. I should have had your mental make-up to hold my people, and to know real living; and because I had not — because the impersonal is always nearer than the personal — I have failed. Well, I transfer what of my mission is transferable to you and your clan,

and when I am gone you shall tell me how it speeds."

He smiled, with the look he always wore for the young man who might have been his son, and who talked with him and had come to know him as a son should have done, and sighed as he turned away. Each day it was plainer that rest must soon be had, and his decision was now clear and definite. With the passing of the Old Year he too would vanish from this busy world that had found no meaning in his message. His passage was engaged, his preparations for long absence proceeding swiftly; but there should be no formal farewells. He would preach his last sermon with no hint that it was his last, and slip away with only a word for the few who had meant something in his life. Even they had found no stay in him, and had turned to other sources. His hair was whitening fast in these latter days, in which he came and went and made no sign. Only his wife knew the terrible restlessness that held him at its will, driving away sleep and making food impossible; and she watched him with sad eyes, knowing that small hope lay even in the enforced banishment.

This meeting of the Ultimates he dwelt upon continually. They were the flower of his people, the best result of these years of painful effort. If, in the presence of a life and thought that held a help for humanity beyond any speculation of his, they were moved to acceptance, to desire for like action, his work would not have been in vain, nor would he pronounce it vain till his own eyes had seen in theirs what verdict the end must hold. He sat hour after hour, his head bowed upon his breast, and his slender fingers beating restlessly on the arms of his chair. Too late to begin again, and no conviction strong enough to make another beginning possible, even were it not too late.

"His vitality is lowering daily," Dr. Strothers said warningly. "You must keep up his strength and divert his mind as far as possible."

"I think sometimes he will die before the time comes that he can go," his wife said. She too had grown old perceptibly; and the gentle, indifferent face showed sharp lines of anxiety. There were tears in her eyes as she looked at Dr. Strothers's troubled face. "Doctor, if he must, let it be at home. Don't send him away to die at sea."

"He need not; he could rally now, if he would," Dr. Strothers said. "Thus far he must be his own physician. If he will not help himself, I cannot help him."

Mrs. Featherstone sighed hopelessly.

"If I could rouse him," she said, and then turned away.

"If you die now, 'Suicide' will be the only verdict," Dr. Strothers had said as he left him that afternoon. "You can live if you will, but you are deliberately letting life slip away. It is not possible that you are willing to allow such ending. Rouse yourself, and remember that only for one cause may a man throw away his life."

"It is not worth even a throw," was the listless reply. "Let it slip as it will."

He roused himself at the groan which came from Dr. Strothers.

"You are taking it more hardly than I," he said. "Don't. It is not worth a groan."

"I would give some share of my own life to make you see the truth as I do," the young man said, with an earnestness so intense that the elder one looked at him with a half wonder, ending in sudden resolution.

"You shall not feel that I have died on your hands in spite of you,' he said, with a melancholy smile.

"I can live, and I will; at least till the water is between us."

"And after," Dr. Strothers said; but Mr. Featherstone shook his head.

"Give me something to fight for," he said, "and it might be. So far I have fought the wind, and my breath is gone."

XXIV.

"IF I was folks, an' had been let out o' prison an' sent up in a balloon, as it were, right in among clear sky, an' the sun a-shinin', seems to me I would n't go to work an' dig a new dungeon in the first sizable cloud I come to. They 're fluffy an' pleasin' to consider outside, but sneezy an' damp, an' no place for sensible human bein's, inside, an' I advise you to come out to onct."

Miss Biggs had given her opinion calmly, and, having given it, took up her work again, — a long red stocking for Felix, the mate to that which long ago had waved in the astonished faces of Heilbrun and his friends. Since then there had been small time for knitting; but within a day or two she had laid in great store of yarn and rubbed up her needles, both of which acts were a tacit surrender to peaceful conditions.

"I can't, — I can't no way in the world," she had said, when Mr. Longshore sent for her, and laid before her a formal proposition that she should take the reconstructed Nineteenth Street houses in charge. "I 'm obleged, more 'n I ever expected to be, for the offer; but I can't."

"Why not?" said Mr. Longshore, after a pause, in which he wondered if the opposition could be as real as it seemed.

"I don't know as it 's worth while to tell; but it 's a good offer, an' I suppose I 'd ought to. I won't do a thing, nor take a thing, that 's in the way of what's laid out for me."

"And what is?" Mr. Longshore said, after another pause.

"I don't know. All I do know is, I 'm the bond-slave of whatever 's a mind to happen. I mean I won't be tied no way so but that I can go off on a minute's warnin' to attend to anything that needs tendin' to. It 's what I 've always said. There 's got to be folks for the unexpected; an' long 's Amanda 's alive she 's that kind."

"I should suppose that this might be called rather unexpected," said Mr. Longshore, meekly.

"That 's so; but you see it 's tyin' down work. If I take the rooms, an' take the money you say it 'll be worth to get the rent out of 'em punctual, and make 'em keep clean an' all that, don't you see I ain't my own mistress, not a day, long 's I 'm at it? No, sir. I 'm sold to H. Longshore, Esquire, and Amanda Biggs ain't her own property. Now, that don't suit. Free I was born — no, I was n't — but free I 've been bound to be; an' now, when I 'm about beginnin' to get some realizin' sense o' my privileges, you say to me, 'Cut 'em off; bottle 'em up, Amanda.' No, sir. It can't be done."

"See here, Miss Biggs," Mr. Longshore made answer, "suppose you listen to me a minute. I don't propose to bind you to hours, or call you to account for what you have done with your time. I want a respectable woman, of sound judgment and good common sense, who will take an interest in the families and give some ideas to the women; one who can speak plainly without offending, and will help to keep the houses in order. I don't know any one who answers that description better than yourself: but if you do, give me her address, and I 'll see if she is to be had."

At the words "take an interest," Miss Biggs had laid down her bag, taken up as a symbol of departure

for any region where the unexpected reigned supreme, and fixed her eyes on the ceiling. They dropped presently.

"If you 're sure there won't be nobody goin' off in a tantrum if they should happen to come in an' find the door locked," she said, in a voice which indicated a certain remonstrance with her own vacillating tendencies. "An' I won't, for any money on earth, bind myself for more 'n a month 't' time. How do I know where the voice 'll call me to go? though I will say this seems a plain case, an' I don't need to go roamin' round for work when there 's enough for forty, right before your face and eyes. 'Take an interest'! I should say I would! It 's what I 've wanted folks to do for me. Forth-puttin' as I be, an' likely to be, for reasons that are enough without mentionin', I 'm good for six times as much when there 's anybody round that cares. Mrs. Herndon 's the first I 've had in many a year, an' what she wants of Amanda, Amanda 's goin' to give her, if it 's eyes an' front teeth — which is double all the way round and a sign o' long life, though you 'd suppose it might shorten it to use up twice what 's wanted, in the making. Suppose this don't work? Suppose the women won't have me round, an' I can't hold 'em to rules or anything else?"

"Then we will try some one else," Mr. Longshore said. "The whole thing is an experiment, and we can't tell how it will work. Do what you can. That 's all."

What Miss Biggs had to do was done at once, and before night the small hair-cloth trunk brought from New Jersey on a recent trip to Camden, and containing the accumulations of a lifetime, had been deposited in the bedroom of her new home, furnished comfortably, and promising, if she so elected, more permanence than had ever been her portion. A

week's experience had shown her that a sufficient degree of unexpectedness was always likely to reveal itself in her dealings with the families, two of which already knew her well. The McCullums were one; and Rose had come home, all memorial of her sad experience left in the little grave on the hill at Foxgrove. None of the neighbors knew more than that Mrs. Herndon had taken her part, and given her work in the country; and though the pretty blue eyes were wistful and sad, and Rose could never be again the careless, light-hearted girl of a year ago, the past was buried deep, and, in the new home which the spring would give them, need never rise up against her.

"There is but one possibility that would make it right and needful for you to tell the whole," Mrs. Herndon had said; "and if that ever comes, you will be strong enough to do it." But Rose shook her head, though cheered in spite of herself at finding that any one could think that the life that came to other girls might some day be hers.

The other families, though regarding Miss Biggs with some suspicion, came gradually to friendliness and acceptance of her peculiar methods. The ash-shafts, the sinks and closets, cellars and halls, were inspected daily with an interest that never flagged; and, mutter as they might, no tenant could resist her enthusiastic cleanliness, or her determination that it should rule in every inch of her territory.

"There 's principles in scrubbing, same as everywhere else," she said. "Rub acrost the grain, an' the dirt scours in deeper an' deeper; but rub along with it, an' after a while your boards are white enough to eat off of. Same 's 't is with folks. Don't rub ag'in the grain more 'n you have to. Some folks is nothin' but knots an' gnarly growth anyhow, an' whatever way you touch 'em is ag'in 'em; but

mostly it 's easy enough." And Miss Biggs waved the brush with which she had been illustrating her views, and went on to the next set of rooms. There was a delightful sense of proprietorship in this daily oversight; and the women who might naturally have been expected to resent it, accepted her mission with something of her own faith, and confided difficulties, household and otherwise, to this singular counsellor, who had always a practical solution, and, in emergencies, a fund for small loans, payment of which was rigidly enacted. Her system of bookkeeping was still on old envelopes or grocery paper, but she never blundered; and as the winter went on, her returns were punctual, and the fact demonstrated again that decent quarters for tenants and a fair return to landlord are not incompatible.

It was still early in December when she went down to Lessing's one afternoon and seated herself near Meg, who had been copying some lists for Heilbrun, and, having finished them, took up a bit of mending, which soon dropped into her lap. Miss Biggs watched her, with a shake of the head. Something was wrong still. These fits of sorrowful abstraction had no right to be. She was well, stronger than for years, and at moments her face glowed with the rich life that had filled her girlhood. Her eyes followed Lessing with a silent worship; and if he laid his hand on her head in passing, or for a moment put his arm about her, she caught his hand and laid her cheek against it, in the mute caress which was her only demonstration. She retreated still from any part in the evening meetings, though listening always with eager attention to every word that fell from Lessing's lips; and for the strangers who came and went in the little room devoted to them she had always interest and help. But the shadow of the past refused to lift, though no memory of Gid had

part in it. With his passing, a curious freedom from any trouble in the thought of him had come to her. It was not Gid, nor any harm that he had done her, but the memory of the life of all those early years, a sense of what she had escaped, yet could never escape. What mate was she for this man who had saved her, and whose own life had no stain, whose soul had never known lie, nor mean deceit, nor any base passion? He loved her. Oh, if there were any way of being more fit to be loved! If there were any one who could say, "See, Meg, I know it all; all that was told and all that never can be told, and I take it all away from you. You will never have to think of it again, because it is forgiven and wiped out."

"That is what Jerry said that night," Meg thought, as she sat there, unconscious that Miss Biggs was watching her with serious eyes. "Perhaps if I should go down again I could understand, and it might happen so. I cannot tell Berthold, because he says always that I have only to go on. I *can't* go on, and feel it all dragging me back."

She took up her work with a long sigh, almost a sob, and started, as Miss Biggs's voice spoke the words with which the chapter opens.

"In a cloud!" she said. "Am I in a cloud? I don't mean to be."

"Meanin' or not meanin' don't help it. You 've got to come out an' stay out," Miss Biggs said impressively. "There ain't anybody but Mrs. Herndon that I think more of than I do of you, Meg, an' it does me good every time I think how things fixed themselves for you. But if you take to broodin' an' sighin' like old times, I shall say one o' two things — either that you ain't got gratitude or sense — an' I know better 'n that — or else that there 's a screw loose. Now, you can tighten up that screw if you 're

a mind to, an' I advise you to hunt up your screw-driver an' be quick about it, if you want to do Lessing or anybody else any good. I 'm your friend, Meg; now hearken to me."

"What would you do if you had been very wicked for a great many years, and then wanted to forget it and could n't?" Meg asked suddenly.

"I 'd say what was done was done, an' I could n't make nor mar it. I should say, 'There you are, an' very likely you 'll rise up ag'in' me some day, but I can't help it. I 'll make up for it if a way 's shown me, but I ain't goin' to spend my strength an' fret my soul out over what 's done.' Now, that 's the only sensible way. The Lord ain't like man, Meg, or what they call the Lord. It 's my belief that he don't work as folks think, — on his own hook, — but sends his messengers hither an' yon to tend to things. It 's his will an' his spirit; but I ain't one to think, as lots do, that he 's into everything the way they say. He is an' he is n't," Miss Biggs pursued, becoming entangled in her subject, and shaking her head impatiently. "It 's spirit of some sort, an' I say it 's guardian angels an' sich, that come straight from him, an' do as he bids. Sometimes I 've even seen 'em when trouble was thick, but seein' spirits ain't as common as some folks make out. You can believe in 'em an' try to do what 's expected of you, without seein' 'em at all."

Lessing had come in while she spoke, and listened to her with a smile.

"It is love and leading," he said. "Why shall you give it a name more than that? See, my Meg! They want me to-night that I go to Domingo, and talk of some things with the men that are there. Shall you have fear if I leave you?"

"No," Meg said. "I am never afraid now. But why must you go?"

She had looked down to hide the sudden flash of intention that came to her eyes. Lessing would not care; he might even offer to go with her if she spoke her wish, but this was something to be done alone.

"Because this Slocum, it seems, is gone there when he has heard that there is a place where experiment goes on, and he is not content that men are well paid, and that all is planned that they may go on from better to best. He wants what he has cried for here, — equal division of all profits, equal everything, that cannot be till men are wiser and made ready for more. The men that the factory employs care not much, save one or two; but he has spoken everywhere to laborers on the railroad, to all who will listen, and they think I shall answer him and make peace. I see not how, but I go with good will, and come again in early morning, my Meg. Have no fear."

"For a man that you have to hang on to to keep his feet on the ground at all, he 's got sense to an amazin' degree," Miss Biggs said, as he hurried away. "There ain't a snarl he can't straighten, if he gives his mind to it."

Meg smiled assent as Miss Biggs rolled up her stocking and stood there reflecting.

"If you want me, I 'll come back about nine," she said. "Maybe you 'll feel better to have me. You 're sure you won't get some kind of a fit in the night?" for Meg had shaken her head decisively. "Tighten the screw an' there ain't any danger; but what I 'm afraid of is that you won't see to that." And Miss Biggs turned away, nodding doubtfully as she went.

Half an hour later, Meg stole out, having told Heilbrun she had an errand to do, and left Felix in his charge, the boy settling absorbedly to work on the drawing which had been added to his lessons

this winter, and which proved an unfailing delight. There was time enough to see the Mission people before the meeting began, if only they were alone; what to say she did not know, but she would tell them what she longed for, and see if they had help for her. Her heart beat fast as she passed through the chapel and went up the narrow stairs at the back, half inclined to turn back, and trembling as she stood.

McAuley himself opened the door, and greeted her with instant hearty recognition.

"I thought you 'd be comin' again," he said. "We 've prayed for it many a time."

"Does that make things come?" Meg said. There was no one there, and she sat down and fixed her eyes on the face turned toward her. "If I should pray, would it make what I want happen?"

"What do you want? It depends on that."

"I want," Meg began, and tears had rushed to her eyes, —"I want to have something taken away. You have been very wicked, I heard you say it, and you said it was all gone and you did not have to even think about it unless you chose to tell. I have been very wicked, too. You know, for I told you a little. Sometimes it does not seem me at all that I was all that. It is years since I have wanted to do any of the old things. But I can't forget — I can't forget. I am married to one who is so good; he cannot even think of what I know, and all he says is that it is done, and I am to go on. I can't go on because I am always remembering. How can I forget?"

"You 're sorry for it all? You would n't be that girl again?"

A strong shudder went over Meg as she shook her head silently.

"Then you 've nothing to do but to tell the Lord Jesus that same, an' promise to trust him the rest o' your life, an' he says to you thin, same as it 's writ-

ten, in more 'n one place, 'I remember your offences no more against you forever.' There 's nothin' you can't get from God for the askin'."

"Then it 's God you mean. I am to promise him. Berthold said that God's love helped us. Is that the same?"

"It 's the same," McAuley answered, after a pause, "an' yet it 's Jesus that does it. He 's the one that loved men better 'n himself, an' lived an' died for 'em, an' goes up and down the earth with his hands out to them that 's lost. You 're not that haythen that you 've never heard that. Have n't you read the Bible?"

Meg shook her head, then added: "Not myself, but I heard them read it last summer sometimes."

"There have been thim that come to the truth an' did n't read it till afterward. There 's all ways o' comin', an' it 's long since I 've said I could fix one o' them to suit myself," McAuley said, after a long pause. "See now. Are you ready to kneel down here an' say you 've sinned an' been worse 'n you knew, an' you 're tired of it all, an' just give your soul to Jesus to keep? The rest 'll come fast enough if you 're willin' for that. You can't take but one step 't' time, do your best."

"You 're sure that will help? That is the way you did?"

"It 's the way I do every day o' me life, else there 'd be no holdin' out. It 's the only way that ever can help. Are ye ready?"

His wife had come in as he spoke, and, with no sign of surprise, took Meg's hand and looked into her perplexed and sorrowful face.

"There 's only one thing that brings comfort that stays," she said. "You know you want it. It 's the love of Jesus."

"And Jesus is the same as God?" Meg said. "It 's only another name for one thing?"

"What else could he be, if he has power to deliver us all?" McAuley said; and Meg hesitated no longer, but knelt, with a strange feeling that the very act held a submission that placed her out of her own power. They were asking that her burden might be taken away, and each had spoken in words she hardly heard for the deep quiet that had come suddenly to her troubled soul. Below, the men were singing. From without came street noises, and the sudden cries and oaths always to be heard when darkness had settled down; but here, where the two knelt whose lives had been worse than anything hers had known, was peace. It had come to them, and now it had come to her. How, she could not tell; but as she rose up silent, unheeding McAuley's whispered word, "An' can't you ask for yourself now?" her face, awe-struck, and as if still listening, but quiet with something more than her old quiet, told the pair that the mystery they taught was doing its work.

"Now stay, an' when the time comes, be prayed for with the rest," McAuley said, as he and his wife exchanged glances. But Meg shook her head.

"I could come to you because you knew so much," she said; "but not down there."

"But if you mean it, if you're going to belong to the Lord, you must speak it out," McAuley said, a little uneasily. "You'll have to come to it, an' why not to-night?"

"Don't be hasty, Jerry," his wife said warningly. "She's in a dream still, and can't speak it yet. You'll come again, an' tell us the whole, when words are plentier."

"Some day," Meg said. She wanted to get away; and there was still time, for the meeting had not begun, and she went quickly down the stairs and toward the door, stopping then, for Old Padgett was entering and recognized her.

"The Lord be praised!" he said. "An' here's Ellen, too. Sit down a minute an' she 'll tell you how well things is going for a pair that when you knew 'em was the Devil's own. Shure, I 'll be wonderin', long 's I live, how the Lord got holt o' me; but get holt he did."

Meg had drawn down her veil. "I can't stay now," she said; "some other time I am coming." And she slipped away, brushing, as she turned, against Mrs. Herndon, who was just entering. It did not surprise Meg. Nothing could have surprised her then. Still as in a dream she walked up Fulton Street and over to a Ninth Avenue car. Felix waited for her, impatient and wondering; for no evening ended happily that did not hold her full knowledge of every step he had taken. He showed her his drawing, and then, as she sat down before the fire, slipped into her lap and laid his head on her shoulder, looking up now and then with contented eyes into her quiet face. His lids drooped at last; and she roused him and went up with him to bed, holding his hand till he slept, and going down again to her place.

"Perhaps if I had known how to ask it would have come here just the same," she thought; "but then I did not. Jerry knew, and she too, because they had both had to forget, and now that I am sure something does answer I do not need to go there, or anywhere, but here where I belong. Now I can go on, as Berthold says; but the heaviness has lifted. How can it be that it should, all at once?" Meg shut her eyes as she leaned back in the chair, and gave herself up to the strange quiet that was about her like a wall. Long ago she remembered a night when granny had beaten her, and she had lain on her bed in the little loft at first grinding her teeth with rage, and stifling the sobs granny should not

hear. She remembered how, as she looked up and saw the stars shining through the broken roof, a sudden thrill had passed over her, — a sense of something warm and sweet and tender, near yet invisible. She had stretched out her hands, for a whisper seemed to come, "Poor little Meg!" and she lay there awed yet comforted, and fell asleep and dreamed that Margaret took her hand and led her across the swamp and up the hill, and said, "Now you are at home, Meg, and shall never go away any more." It was so real that for days she had thought it might somehow be true, and that suddenly Margaret would appear, and then she had forgotten and only remembered when granny was fierce, or Ben knocked her about as he had done always. Bram rolled between often, and took the blow meant for her. Poor Bram! Where was he now, and did anybody care for him? She might have asked Ben that night, — the night that had led to so much.

"Bram cared; he always cared," she said. "Somebody ought to care for him. I shall ask — I do ask — that something may speak to him and make him know that God loves him."

Meg shook her head as the words came involuntarily, and looked around her for a moment, awestruck at the desire stirring in her soul, but smiling as again that deep thrill of happy quiet made itself felt in and about her. It was what Lessing had said, only she had been stupid and had not understood. God loved her, — loved all his world; and if they were only sorry for wrong, and wanted the right, would lead them on to peace and understanding. If he had told her that one must ask, that to want the gift had to come before one could receive, she might have asked here; but Jerry knew, from his own misery, some things that Lessing could not, and she was glad that she had been there. She crept up to

bed at last and fell asleep, as Felix had done, with a sense of something warm and loving enfolding her, and when she awoke it was still with her. Miss Biggs came down and stayed for a moment, well pleased as she saw the serene look in her face, and Felix ran back to throw his arms about her again.

"She gets more out of a word than lots o' folks get out of a whole bookful," Miss Biggs said, as she hastened back to her post, confident that her warning had roused Meg, and that if brooding began again it would be easy to produce the same results by the same methods. Lessing's eyes rested on her with a sense of some fresh attainment for her, but he asked no question. He had come home very weary, — almost depressed. Slocum had spoken in a small hall over a saloon, and, having harangued himself into his most excited and irrational condition, scouted argument, and denounced Lessing as a lukewarm and heartless expounder of theories but half understood.

There were hints that Slocum had been sent there, and that Harkness, ardently as he detested socialism, had chosen this method of assailing Lennox, who had rejected all overtures and proved inaccessible to any temptation to combination. Two or three of the best workers had had mysterious offers, — hints that if they left their fortunes were made, and that, at best, the little mill could not hold out more than a few months longer; and, devoted as his adherents were, Lennox had felt a little of the old depression in fighting this intangible foe. Slocum had been there for a week, — a waste of time when one considered the limited material he had to work upon, — but he showed no inclination to leave, and gave his evenings to the little hall, where more and more met him each evening to listen to his denunciations of all established order.

To answer him was waste of words, the excitement he had produced being as wild as his methods; but the more rational among the men had adjourned to Lennox's little parlor, and listened there to the appeal that Lessing poured out, — an appeal, not for levelling all distinctions, but for raising the low till they were ready for what still lay beyond them.

"You are worth only what you are in yourselves," he said at last, to the impatient hearer who questioned, —

"But why have n't I as good a right as Vanderbilt to some of his money, if I could get it?"

"You have a right to all you can make yourself worth," Lessing answered; "and often, ah! often, I know, that fails to come because justice rules not. But if you say you are worth it because you want it, that you may please yourself in your own way, that is not so — is never so. Though you shall burst, you are worth but what you make yourself worth; and he who would have his full share of the God-gift must make himself ready. When you are just to all, true to all, live a life where love rules, then has come the time when you are ready for all gifts. Here you may learn, for I see well that with you in this place where you work is a soul that can teach, and that knows Eternal law. Believe him. He lives it, and she, and thus comes right to speak. These words that so stirred you to-night mean but destruction to all that is best. No destruction of things as they are, no anarchy or revolution, helps you on one step toward the age we labor for till it comes. Have I not known all stages? Out of prison and loss and all renunciation I know what I may say, and always it is one word. The masses mean nothing. I will not seek to move the mass. But I speak to each mind. I say to each soul, Learn what you are worth, what you can do, what you can be. Help one another.

Have no strifes, but go on to more knowledge, more love; always more and more, and our golden age is already begun."

"He is talking over their heads," Lennox thought, as he went on; but the men listened absorbedly. Something in his personality held them; and as he ended one of them asked him to tell the story of his prison life. Lessing hesitated a moment; but as Mrs. Lennox said, "Do, please do, if you are willing," he began. Very simply and quietly the words came; and when the story ended he said: "And so, my brothers, you see that I do know well what I say, and that for all life that shall yet be here, I am forever on the side of him that is oppressed. But see you not, too, that it is the oppressor who must understand, and to whom we shall speak, and that fire and sword and all anarchy are steps backward, never forward? The march is forever onward, and we go side by side."

He had told Meg something of this as he sat here, carving at moments and then dropping the tools as he spoke.

"I like not the country well," he said, "for it is all one flatness; but it is a place you shall see, my Meg, for a thought has made it grow, and it is one spot where a master lives to be just. Perhaps even we may go there some day to help the larger work he would do, but that shall be as it will. But, Meg, tell me. Something new is come to you. Is it a new thought?"

He had taken Meg's hand and was looking into her face. Her eyes fell a moment, then lifted quietly.

"I did not know whether I could tell or not," she said; "but I shall, because you will know how it has come. I do not, but you will."

He had drawn her down by him as she spoke, and he still held her hand as she told him of her sudden resolution, and the strange result.

"It is not a dream," she ended. "Sometimes to-day it has seemed as if it must be a dream, but it is not. All that heaviness rolled away. I feel as if it could not come again because God loves me, and will not let it. Ought I to think different?"

"No, my Meg," Lessing said, after a little silence. "It is all part of one thing. I see well that another door has opened, — a door I know not well, — but only one of many, and you see in, more than yesterday or ever, into that kingdom of the Father that is ours. He is good, — this Jerry, — and he knows, as you say, because he too has suffered. Go when you will, if in that way lies help."

"I do not want to go," Meg said. "It seems to me help would have been here too, if I had only understood, for it came back with me. It does not go away."

"It was always here, for it is the spring of all life," Lessing said, and turned to his work again.

"I should n't think your husband would let you go on wearing that little black bonnet and all, like a vowed Sister or something unnatural," Miss Erminia said discontentedly, as she looked at Meg. They had sent for her that afternoon, and Miss Marcia's eyes rested on her with wonder at the change.

"I told you you could live if you would," she said; "but I hardly thought you could, Meg. I shall come and see you when I am over this nipping rheumatism, and you must spare me Felix all you will. I wonder how it would work if all the world were as really themselves as Meg is," she said, when Meg had left them.

"So many of us have n't any real self, or else so many selves that to live them all out would be impossible," Mrs. Herndon said. "Half the world is simply a mass of small beliefs and prejudices and

customs, with no power to think an individual thought. It needs some convulsion of Nature to make room for a new idea. Meg was put outside all ordinary life in the beginning, and could not live it if she would."

"I don't want to alter anything but her dress," said Miss Erminia. "A bride has no right to wear black, and a handsome young woman like that. It's a bad sign, besides being an insult to her husband, and it's unwholesome, and leads to paralysis and lunacy and softening of the brain. You need n't smile in that peculiar way, Marcia. I 've been studying the matter, and I am disposed to agree with that remarkable Mrs. Pearsons, that I heard Sunday evening on the sympathetic relationships of thought and color, you know. Let me give you a little synopsis of her ideas."

"Not now," Margaret said hastily, as Miss Marcia looked toward her in helpless appeal. "I am going to read to her now."

"She listens to everything but me," Miss Erminia said; "and I 'm sure it's not only bad for her, but most mysterious, that she should turn against her own sister in this way. And that is n't the only mysterious thing. It's a week or more since Paul Strothers has been near us. He must be engaged to somebody and his mind taken up; but it's exceedingly rude to old friends, and I shall tell him so."

The bell had rung as she spoke, and Simmons came up with a card.

"Dr. Strothers, for the ladies," he said, with a swift glance at Mrs. Herndon, who had turned away suddenly.

"I don't see how I am to get down," Miss Marcia said, trying to rise and falling back, her face flushed with pain, "but I do want to see him."

"He will come up," Mrs. Herndon said, as Simmons hesitated. "Ask him to come up, Simmons."

Miss Marcia looked at him earnestly as he came toward her, smiling, and held her hand for a minute, looking at her with kind eyes. He was paler than usual; and as the smile passed it was easy to see that some anxiety was underneath the quiet manner. Margaret had met him as usual, but in a few moments left the room, summoned by another caller, nor did she return. If Miss Erminia had not been there he would have spoken freely; and he talked on, asking what distractions she had chosen for this winter, and if she had saved any time for cultivating his acquaintance.

"I'm sure I never knew it made much difference whether I cultivated it or not," Miss Erminia said peevishly. She had soured perceptibly in these latter months, and required from her small world more and more explanation and apology as time went on. "I'm only out Tuesdays and Fridays, unless I change my plans, and Thursdays now and then; but you know perfectly well you'd rather come when I'm out than when I'm in." And Miss Erminia suddenly dissolved in tears, and left the room.

"She is n't well," Miss Marcia began apologetically; but Miss Erminia had turned.

"I'm well enough; well as I ever am, I mean," she hastened to add, for the first statement could not by any means be allowed to stand. "But I've been despised and slighted till I wonder there's anything left of me, or why I came where nobody wants me, and only asks me to get Marcia. Margaret thinks of nothing but herself and her plans, and they are crazier all the time. She's been out to that village with a barbarous name, — Domingo, — and she 's full now, of what they are doing there, besides being fuller of this ridiculous Mission." Indignation had dried Miss Erminia's tears, and she sat down and faced Dr. Strothers as if challenging him to battle.

"I would n't have supposed one of our family would allow themselves in such a place. It 's indecent; and if you have any influence — and I don't suppose you have, or anybody else, for Margaret gets more set in her ways every hour she lives — you ought to use it and keep her away. It 's dangerous to go near such a man; he 's liable to a relapse any moment."

"Then you don't want to go down and see for yourself."

"No, I don't," said Miss Erminia, firmly. "I have no patience with shouting Methodists or any people that do all their religion in public. It is very unpleasant, and I consider it really lowering, you know, to take interest in such goings-on. How Margaret can do it, I don't see. It 's an indication of advanced deterioration, and I never would have believed it. I hope you have n't had anything to do with it."

"Only to take her there in the beginning, and to go whenever I can find time. He is doing a remarkable work, and he is a remarkable man," Dr. Strothers said quietly.

"He 's a fraud. You are all terribly deceived," Miss Erminia made answer, after an astonished pause. "It 's an infatuation. I certainly think every one is going crazy together, and I don't wish to hear anything about it."

"You need not," Dr. Strothers said, as he rose to go; and Miss Erminia looked at him with sudden penitence.

"I think I shall have to have a tonic," she said. "I 'm so nervous and miserable that I make everybody else miserable, and I don't really mean to do that. I would n't for the world."

Dr. Strothers had taken out his prescription-book and wrote as he stood, folding the paper when he had finished. "This will help you," he said; and as

Miss Erminia presently opened it, passing over the cabalistic signs at the head, she read: —

"He my servant is dear to me who is free from enmity, merciful, the friend of all Nature, exempt from pride and selfishness, the same in pain and pleasure, patient of wrongs, contented, constantly devout, of subdued passions and firm resolves. . . . He my servant is dear to me who is unexpecting, just, pure, impartial, and free from distraction of mind; who is the same in friendship and hatred, in honor and dishonor; who is unsolicitous about the event of things; who is of a steady mind."

Miss Erminia left the room silently. It was most impertinent; and she should certainly tell him so if she ever spoke to him again, which was very doubtful. If Margaret had n't insisted on going into philanthropy, and taking up all sorts of people, there would never have been such trouble; but Dr. Strothers was just as bad. It might be well to begin the baths again. They were very quieting, and she saw interesting people there. There was time even now if she hurried a little; and she made ready and went out, wondering, as she passed the reception-room, who Margaret had there, for the voice was unmistakably Irish, and was going on steadily as if some long story was in progress. She shook her head disgustedly as she passed on, and even stronger sense of outrage would have filled her had she known to whom the voice belonged. McAuley himself sat there. He had come to ask aid for some special case, and sat talking of others, and wondering what prompted Mrs. Herndon's interest, and what hold had been gained upon her. She smiled as she thought what an amazing apparition this would seem to the people who in the coming week were to meet under her roof, and wondered a little at her own feeling for him.

"It is because he is absolutely real," she thought. "He can only go to a certain point, but up to that point he is absolutely master. I wish you would tell me all about yourself," she went on aloud, as McAuley sat there in contented silence, his pale face showing the marks of long-continued weakness, contradicted always by the powerful frame. "Not the bits alone that you tell in the Mission, but the whole, — how you grew up, and how everything happened to you."

"It 's a long story. You would n't care for the whole of it," he said.

"If you have time, the whole of it is exactly what I want."

"You 'll think it 's in a sewer you are, before I 'm done," he said; "but, for all the foulness, it 's one with a straight course to clean water, an' if you stand the beginning, the ending, you know well enough, is in the big sea itself that 's sendin' me on homeward. Shure, this is how it began."

XXV.

"I WOULD n't go over it all, not for any money ye could put in me hand," McAuley said, as he turned toward Mrs. Herndon, "if it was n't that it 's to get at them that can't be made to believe any other way. I don't mean I ain't willin' to tell one like you, that ain't curious just for the sake o' knowin'; but there 's many that comes in to hear an' goes out after a bit, an' says I 'm on the make, an' get well paid for every time I spill it out. Fellows come in ripe for a row. You ain't a reg'lar down there, an' I don't suppose you ever saw, in your life, an out-an'-out rough, spillin' over with fight, an' bound to make something fly before he 's through. Well, there was more o' that kind used to bother us than does now, an' it 's lucky they 're less, for the time when I could just take 'em up by the scruff o' the neck an' drop 'em out on the sidewalk, like you 'd drop a strange cat, is pretty well over. Strong? Why, till them hemorrhages got hold o' me, and weakened the arms o' me so 't I can't clutch the way I used, there was n't a man in the ward I would n't 'a' faced an' knocked endways. They knew it, too, an' fought shy o' me.

"Last night there come in a fellow, an' sat down half-way up, an' the minute my eye fell on him, an' the sneery smile of him, I knew him, but where, I could n't think nor tell, till up he gets, an' then it come like a flash, an' I minded well enough — in Sing Sing an' the loom next to me. Up he got, an'

whether he was in earnest or not 't was hard to make out; but he said he remembered me times back, an' the way I used to look, an' how well set up I seemed to be now, with my fine coat an' good clothes all through, an' just lickin' my lips to think what a comfortable, easy go I was havin', an' a-chucklin' to myself every time I told the life I 'd led.

"I 'd heard him to there without a word, but now I knew the time was up.

"'You 're out there,' says I, risin' up so sudden that he jumped, — he thought, maybe I 'd hit him. 'Yes, you 're out there. There 's many a one says I love to tell the story o' my own life, an' I tell you an' them again, there 's nothin' I would n't do, if I could see my way clear, never to tell it more in this world. Do you suppose if a man was set up to his neck in a sewer, an' kept there months an' years, he 'd be chucklin' over it when he got out? Faith not! He 'd be apt to keep quiet, unless he saw some other fellow slumping in the same place, an' then, if he 'd the heart of a grasshopper, he 'd warn him off. Do you think I 'll ever stop rememberin' that there 's wellnigh thirty years o' me life gone in deviltry, an' no help for it, an' the only comfort in thinkin' that if I had n't been the Devil's own all that time I 'd never know how to feel for thim that 's in his clutch yet? He 's a tight grip on you, me friend, an' many a one like you; an' you 'd better come up an' let every soul pray hard that you may know it for yourself.'

"He made for the door then, an' won't come back in a hurry. I know his kind. It 's a kind God don't want, an' the Devil won't have. God forgive me for sayin' so; but you 'd do it, too, maybe, if you had 'em to deal with, an' could n't ever be just certain if they had a soul or not. I used to say they had, an' must be worked over, an' I don't say now they have n't;

only there 's others to spend your strength on, an' I 've had to learn to let these mostly alone. It 's the kind that makes bummers and tramps goin' up an' down, an' no holdin' 'em to any honest work, an' no holdin' 'em to a thing, try how you will. The Lord knows. He made 'em, an' maybe he 'll find out a way after all. An' it 's a poor show for me to be doubtin' about any human being, when I 've got meself to remember. This ain't the story o' me in the beginnin', but it 's a bit of it now, an' all along since first I put out a hand to help. I 'm comin' now to what went before. I 'm wonderin,' too, if Ireland would look the same if I went back to it. 'T was a pretty country I came from, but me an' mine had small business in it but to break the laws an' then curse the makers of 'em. My father was a counterfeiter, and he 'd run away from justice before ever I can remember him. There was a lot of us, an' me they put with me grandmother. 'T was an old woman she was, an' a devout Roman Catholic; an' many 's the time, when she was tellin' her beads an' kissin' the floor for penance, I 'd shy things at her just to hear her curse an' swear at me, an' then back to her knees. I 'd got well beyond her or anybody by the time I was thirteen. They let me run loose. The pigs themselves was n't freer to root where they would. I 'd no schoolin', an' blows for meat an' drink, till I wished meself dead many a time. I thought to get to me sister in America was near the same as Paradise. I 'd had thoughts, too, o' the say, but they was well knocked out o' me crossin' it. Whin I 'd got to her, for a while I run errands for me brother-in-law, an' helped him. But I was tall of my years, an' strong, an' had no fear for any man alive, an' a born thief as well, that stealin' came as easy to as breathin'; and soon I was in a den on Water Street, learning to be a prize-fighter,

an' with a boat on the river for thievin' at night. Think I like to look back to that time? I was nineteen then, an' I don't suppose a bigger nuisance ever stepped above ground. I made good hauls, for the river police did n't amount to much then, an' it was pretty easy to board a vessel an' take what you pleased. The Fourth Ward belonged to my kind. It 's bad enough now, but it 's heaven to what it was fifteen years ago. I owe 'em a life any day they want it, for I helped it along in deviltry faster 'n any other dozen. Some hated me, an' some was afeard o' me; but we hung together, an' thought we had a good time.

"Now, I 'd done enough to send me to prison forty times over, an' I knew it, but that did n't make it any easier to go there for something I *had n't* done. It was sworn on me by some that hated me an' wanted me out o' the way. Fifteen years in prison! That was the sentence, an' me not twenty, an' wild as a hawk all the days o' me life, wantin' free air, an' hardly able to stand the house over me head sometimes. That hour goin' up the river was the toughest I 'd ever come to. I was mad with rage, but handcuffed an' forced to keep quiet. I was a mind to kill my keeper, an' I marked him then. 'Wait,' I said to meself; 'I 'll be even with you some day if I have to hang for it.' An' when I put on the dress, an' they shut me in, I knocked me head ag'in the wall, an' if I dared, would 'a' killed myself. An' then I made up my mind I 'd obey rules, an' see if I could n't get pardoned out, or maybe there 'd come a chance of escape, an' I set my mind toward that. I tried it for two years, — learned to read, an' had a pile o' cheap novels they let us buy; an' I learned carpet-weaving, an' no one had a word to say ag'inst me. But then I grew weakly. I 'd been used, just as I told you, to the open air always, an' a shut-

in life told on me; an' then I got ugly, thought 't was n't any use. A year don't seem much to me now; but a year then, an' me holdin' on to meself — oh, it was long! I got ugly in just the bearin' it, an' then they punished me. Do you know what that is? It 's the leather collar, that holds an' galls you, an' you strapped up with your toes just touchin'; and it 's the shower-bath, that leaves you in a dead faint till another dash brings you out. Kicks an' cuffs an' floggin's and half rations. I was up for punishment eleven times in six months; down to skin an' bone. I tell you I 'd 'a' brained that keeper joyfully any minute. The murder run down me arms when he come near me, an' my fingers was full o' twitch an' tingle to get at him. Then I mended my ways, for I must get out. The sight o' the sky, when I crossed the yard, put my heart in my throat. Oh, to get out! There 's many a night I 've lain on the floor of me cell an' cried like a baby for freedom, if it was n't but five minutes. I 'd 'a' sold myself to the Devil only to get out; an' I was sold, an' not knowin' nor carin' either.

"There come a Sunday morning. I 'd been in prison five years. I 'd begun to think I 'd die there, an' never a soul to know nor care when they chucked me into the ground. I dragged into the chapel an' sat down. Then I heard a voice I knew, an' looked up. There by the chaplain was a man I 'd been on many a spree with, — Orville Gardner. He stepped down off the platform. 'My men,' he says, 'I 've no right anywhere but among you, for I 've been one of you in sin;' and then he prayed till there was n't a dry eye there but mine. I was ashamed to be seen cryin', an' ashamed o' the men because they was fools enough to cry. So I just looked at him, an' wondered what had come to him to make him so different. He said a verse that struck me, an' when

I was back in the cell I took down the Bible that's always there, an' begun to hunt for it. I read awhile till I come to something that hit the Catholics, I thought, an' I pitched it down an' kicked it all round the cell. 'The vile heretics!' I says. 'That's the way they show up Catholics, is it?' I 'd been a good one, you see, an' I knew what the priest would say to that verse. It was this: 'Now, the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; having a conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe an' know the truth.'

"'I 'll have a Catholic Bible,' says I, 'and not this thing, that no decent Catholic 'd touch with a ten-foot pole;' an' soon as ever I could I got a Catholic Bible from the library; but it was pretty much the same, only more boxed up with notes. I read 'em both, an' the more I read the more miserable I was.

"I wanted to be different. I was dead sick o' myself. I kept thinkin' about that new look in Gardner's face. 'What makes it?' says I; 'an' if he 's different, why can't I be? Now if I send for the priest,' as I 'd come near doin' over an' over, 'he 'll set me doing penance, an' sayin' more prayers than you could shake a stick at, an' the like o' that. The chaplain here — he's a heretic Protestant — he says I 'm to be sorry for me sins an' ask God to forgive me. Which is the way? There can't be two,' an' so I kep' on wonderin'.

"At last I says to meself, 'Maybe prayin' on your own hook 'll show the way somehow.' Now, why should I 'a' minded? but if ten thousand people had been in that cell I could n't ha' felt worse about prayin'. I kneeled down, blushin' that hot as I 'd

hardly done in me life, an' up ag'in, too ashamed to stay; an' that's the way it was three or four weeks, an' me that dazed with thinkin' an' trouble that I got stupid like an' went in a dream. Then there come a night when I said I'd pray till some sense come to me, an' if it did n't I'd never pray again. I was weak an' trembly. It seemed as if I could die easy enough. I knelt there an' waited between the times I prayed. I would n't stir from my knees. My eyes were shut, an' the sweat rollin' from me face in big drops. I thought I was goin', sure. Then, in a minute, somethin' seemed to be by me. I heard a voice, or I felt I heard one: 'My son, thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee.'

"To the day o' me death I'll think I saw a light about me, an' smelled somethin' sweet as flowers in the cell. I did n't know if I was alive or not. I shouted out, 'Oh, praise God! praise God!'

"'Shut your noise,' says the guard, goin' by. 'What's the matter?'

"'I've found Christ,' says I. 'My sins is forgiven.'

"'I'll report you,' says he, an' he took my number; but he did n't report me, an' I lay down an' to sleep quiet as a baby.

"Well, then, when I see it had come to me, I says, 'There's plenty that needs it just as bad,' an' so I began to pray for others. I was quiet an' content all the time, an' believed, if it was good for me, God'd find a way to let me out o' prison. I did n't pray for it for two years, but just worked there, and many a one turned to a new life, an' stuck to it.

"Seven years an' six months I'd been there, when at last comes a pardon, an' I went down to New York.

"There was never a lonesomer man alive. Oh, did n't it make me pity the fellows that come out an' no place to go, an' every one sidlin' off from 'em

because they're jail-birds! I would n't go back to the Fourth Ward, for fear I might be tempted, an' I wandered 'round tryin' for work till one day I met a friend, an' he took me to a lager-beer saloon. Lager beer had come up since I went up the river. I did n't know it was any more hurt than root beer; they said it was n't. But that first night did for me. My head got in a buzz, an' in a week or two I wanted something stronger. I got work in a hat shop, an' had good wages; but a strike come, an' I led it and lost the place. It was war time, an' I went into the bounty business, — a rascally dirty business, too. Then I had a boat on the river again. I 'd buy stolen goods of the sailors, an' then make 'em enlist for fear o' being arrested, and I 'd take the bounty. The end o' the war stopped this, but I 'd lived high. I 'd even a fast horse, and turned out like a swell; but I had to come down to the river an' stick to that, buying an' selling smuggled goods, an' payin' for all I could in counterfeit money. Do you remember when the 'Idaho' burned in the East River? Me an' my partners rowed out — not to save life, but to rob; but when we saw them screamin' in the water we turned to an' helped 'em, though one in the boat said we 'd make, just pickin' up coats an' hats. You 'd think the biggest brutes goin' could n't 'a' thought o' such a thing then, an' we haulin' 'em in; but that 's what we 'd come to.

"I got worse and worse. Often an' often I was shot at. Do you think I did n't remember what I 'd had given me an' how I 'd lost it? I did n't pray; I did n't dare. I kept under liquor all the time to head off thinking; for I said God was done with me, an' I was bound for hell, sure.

"It was somewhere along about this time that one night I 'd gone over to Brooklyn very drunk — too drunk to do my share of the work — an' as my partner

boarded the ship we were after I slipped an' went under like a shot. An eddy carried me one way, an' the boat went another. I knew I was drownin', for I went down twice, an' I called on God, though I felt too mean to. It seemed as if I was lifted up an' the boat brought to me somehow. The water had sobered me. When I was in, an' sat there, shakin' an' dumb, I knew, plain as if a voice spoke to me, 'You 've been saved for the last time. Go out on that river again an' you 'll never have another chance.' I was mad; I went home, an' drank an' drank an' drank. I was sodden with drink, an' as awful a lookin' case — more so than you 've ever laid eyes on. An', oh, the misery of me thoughts! It was the John Allen excitement then, an' I 'd heard the singin' an' was sick with rememberin', an' yet drinkin' day an' night to drown it all. I 'd got that low down, after all the money I 'd made fly, that I 'd hang round the bucket-shops an' sawdust the floor an' clean up the nastiness just for one glass o' bad rum. An' I 'd hang round an' look at every soul that come in like a hungry dog, hopin' they 'd treat. They 'd send me out. 'Come, Jerry, give us a rest. Go out an' take a cool off round the block.' Oh, how mean I 'd feel! But I 'd come out. I was like as if I 'd die if I did n't get a drink. I had a home, too. Want to know what it was like? I 'll tell you. 'T was in a cellar on Front Street. Me an' three men slept on some foul straw in the corner. Often the tide came in, an' we 'd wake, an' the water well over us an' risin'. We 'd a log there that we kept a purpose, an' we 'd get up on the log an' float round till it went down. One night some fellows stole the log an' locked the door for fun. The tide was high, an' we were pretty drunk, an' could n't find the log nor the door neither; an 'before we 'd kicked the door down the water was up to our necks, an' we sober enough, an' scared to death

for fear we'd drown. Then I had another home; that was the same kind, only I changed my base an' tried a Brooklyn cellar instead of a New York one. Oh, was n't I a dirty rag-shop of a man! There 's times when I sit now, an' the tears come in my eyes when I see my pretty, nice furniture an' carpets, an' everythin' good an' comfortable, an' think what a thing I was, an' what the Lord gives me now. A drunken bummer, an' that was all I was. I 'd got to be deader 'n Lazarus, but God lifted me out o' that grave an' saved me. None o' my people 'd look at me; I disgraced 'em all. My sister begged me to clear out an' not bring more shame on 'em, an' my mother the same. I 'd a patch on me nose the year round, an' a black eye, too; sometimes a pair of 'em. Get into a fight an' smash things; turn off the gas for fun, an' then break chairs an' everything else; get taken up an' off to the station-house; next morning up to the Tombs: 'Ten days, young man;' 'Three months, young man.' Nice kind o' fun!

"Well, at last there came a city missionary one day to the house in Cherry Street I boarded in. He shied a bit when he saw me at the top o' the stairs, — a head like a mop, an' an old red shirt. He 'd been pitched downstairs by fellows like me, an' I 'd 'a' done it myself once. I hung round while he went into a room, thinkin' maybe he could get me a job of honest work, an' when he come out I told him so. He asked me out on the pavement, an' I did n't wonder. He said afterward, I was so evil-lookin' he did n't know what I might do. But he took me straight along to the Howard Mission; an' there we had a long talk, an' a gentleman wanted me to sign the pledge. 'It 's no use,' says I; 'I shall break it.' 'Ask God to keep you from breaking it,' he says. I thought a minute, an' then I signed it an' went home. My partner was there, an' he laughed when I told

him. He had a bottle of gin in his hand that minute. 'You,' he says — 'you, here, drink now.' I took the glass an' drank. 'That 's the last glass I 'll ever take,' says I. 'Yes,' says he, 'till the next one.'

"I 'd barely swallowed it when the missionary came in. We went out together, an' I told him I was dead broke an' hungry, an' would have to go on the river once more, anyhow. 'Jerry,' says he, 'before you shall ever do that again I 'll take off this coat and pawn it.' The coat was thin an' old; I knew he was poor, an' it went to my heart that he 'd do that. He went away in a minute, an' when he come back he brought me fifty cents. He followed me up day after day, an' at last, one night at his house, where he 'd had me to tea, an' there was prayin' and singin' afterward, I prayed myself once again, an' believed I should be forgiven my wickedness, mean cur as I was. There was n't any shoutin' this time, but there was quiet an' peace.

"It was a hard pull. I got work now an' then, but mostly not. An' then everybody thought I was shammin' for what I could get. I did n't wonder, an' I helped it along by doin' what you 'd never believe — cavin' in again. Three times I was drunk, an' do you know what did it? Tobacco. That 's why I 'm so down on tobacco now. Chew an' smoke, an' there 'll be a steady craving for something, an' mostly it ends in whiskey. A man that honestly wants the Spirit of God in him has got to be clean, I tell you, inside an' out. He 's got to shut down on all his old dirty tricks, or he 's gone. That 's the way I found it. An' that gives me a sense, too, about the kind of holes they live in. Was n't I in one meself, an' did n't I know? Thirty-two dark rooms in that house I was in, an' never a breath except from the ones they open into. Sleep in one once, even when you 're used to it, an' there 's a band round your

head when you wake up like as if you 'd an iron cap screwed on, an' a sinking an' a craving at your stomach. You don't want to eat. There 's nothing answers it but liquor, an' with the smell o' that you forget the other smells. You do with less food after a glass of that. An' the darkness means the Devil's own deeds, that I 'll not name before you. Ah! I could n't tell you what sights I 've seen. I think sometimes, how is it God himself don't turn sick, an' sweep it all away? Men, women, an' children, an' less sense than beasts. Packed in that way, you see, it 's easy enough to get in a hundred and eighty — even two hundred. 'T is n't always that they need to be so packed, but they get not to care. There 's empty rooms now up the side streets; but they get used and can't do without the hearin' what they all have to tell, an' the most of 'em drink too hard to have money left for anythin' but their own plank or two on a floor. An' that 's why I say the best thing for such houses is clean destruction, though I don't mean to get on that now; only there ain't a brick nor a plank in 'em but what 's soaked an' steeped in sin an' misery.

" That ain't tellin' you how it come out. I was married by this time to Maria, an' she 's been God's help from that day to this, an' often an' often we talked about some way to get at the poor souls in the Fourth Ward. We were doing day's work, both of us, an' poor. But we said, 'Why have we been used to filth an' nastiness an' all not so 's to help some out of it?' An' one day I had a kind of a vision. I thought we had a house in the Fourth Ward, an' a big bath, an' I saw a stream o' people coming in. I washed 'em outside, an' the Lord washed 'em inside, an' I cried as I thought, 'Oh, if I could only do that for Jesus' sake!' 'Do it for one if you can't for more,' said Maria; an' that 's the way we begun, in

an old rookery of a house, walls leanin' every which way, an' rats pokin' their heads out to watch. We'd but one room, an' a little sign hung out 'HELPING HAND FOR MEN.'

"You'd never believe how many that sign drew in. We did what we could, an' when Thanksgiving day come, friends give us a good dinner for all. Afterwards we had a meeting, an' it was so blessed we felt to say they should all come next night. From that day to this, in the old building an' then in the new, there's been a meeting every night in the year, an' now it's hundreds — yes, thousands — that can say the Water Street Mission was their help to a new life. Day an' night we work, you know how. My life is going from me; but, living or dying, it's the Lord's. All these years He's held me; but I don't know now but I'd 'a' fallen again if I hadn't been so busy holding on to others. An' that's the way to keep men; set 'em to work. The minute they say they're sick of their old ways an' turn round, start 'em to pull in somebody else. When your soul's just on fire, longin' to get hold of every poor wretch you see, there's no time for your old tricks, nor any wanting to try 'em again. I could talk a month telling of one an' another that's been there. Oh, there's stories if you only knew 'em! An' not a day that you don't know for sure that there ain't a bummer in the Fourth Ward so low down but what the Lord can pick him out o' the gutter an' set him on his feet. That's why I tell everything right out. There's times I'm dead sick of remembering it, but I have to do it; an' them very times seem the ones that it helps most. An' as long as tongue can move, may I never be ashamed to tell what I'm saved from. There's men round the Ward now says I'm laying for a stake. They'd like to hang me, some of 'em, an' take my head for a

foot-ball. A stake! Why, I've had nine hundred dollars 't' time, an' could 'a' run with it if I 'd liked. I 've handled thousands in the Mission, an' it did n't stick to my hands neither. Twelve years ago I 'd steal a hat, an' sell it for five cents an' get a glass o' rum, but I 'm ready to be trusted now. One thing I never was, an' that was a coward. I 'd go for a man if he was big as a bull. I've gone for 'em sometimes in some o' the places I've herded in. Do you know what they 're like? They 're hell upon earth. I heard you ask once why more women did n't come into the Mission. I 'll tell you. When a girl has grown up with a dozen in a room all her life, how 's she going to know decency or cleanliness? An' when she 's down, she 's down, an' no way to get her up, it seems, though I 'm one that says she 's no worse than the man that put her there. It 's only now an' again you get 'em steady, and why, I puzzle an' puzzle over, an' no finding out. You can haul in a hundred men to one woman. What it means the good Lord only knows, but they don't stay put. They cry an' promise, an' promise an' cry, an' you do for 'em with all your might, an' all at once they 're off, an maybe you never see 'em again. There 's women next door to us, decoy ducks, that were reformed two or three years, an' then went back. When they 're once down, 't is n't once in five hundred times you can pull them out. You remember a pretty one that run in cryin' the last night you was down. She 's been to every meeting round here, an' cried an' begged to be helped. She 's been taken first to one 'Home' an' then another, an' she 's run from every one back to her old life. It 's the system that 's wrong. That 's my opinion. You take a 'Home' where a lot of 'em is in together, an' the Devil 's let loose. They chew tobacco, an' chew snuff, an' get drink on the sly, an' the old ones tell

the young ones all their lives, an' the last end is worse than the first, for they learn a lot of deviltry to add to their own. There ain't but one way, as I can see, to save 'em. Keep 'em apart. Let Christian families that can, make up their minds to take one at a time; hedge her round; give her enough to do an' get her interested, an' pray night an' day she may be kept. An' don't look at her as if she was the scum o' the earth. She's no more scum than the man that brought her to it. I 'd like a pledge for men, — a temperance one too, you might call it, for there 's decent men that don't think straight about this, — a pledge to respect all women an' guard themselves from temptation. Maybe we 'll come to it yet. But there ain't a thing in our work that 's as discouraging as these very girls. When they come from the places they do, what have you got to build on? The work 's got to begin at the beginning, I tell you. Get hold o' the children. Send 'em off! Do anything that 'll train 'em differently. They 're born in sin, an' born to sin, an' the Lord only knows what 'll come if good men an' women don't wake up an' take hold. A stray mission here an' there is only a drop in the bucket. Hundreds an' thousands down in the slums, an' people sitting by with their eyes shut! It tears the heart in you to think of it all. Thy kingdom come? How 's it to come if every soul that wants it true does n't take hold an' work, *work*, WORK, for it? An' the answer is *sure*. Oh, who knows that better 'n me? I 'm goin' meself. I wasted my life, a lot of it, in sin an' misery, an' I 'm that tired rest 'll be sweet. I can't sing much; one lung is all gone, an' the other one going. My voice breaks all the time, an' when I must stop working for the Master that called me, may I go quickly! But one thing I pray for day an' night, an' sure I believe it 'll be granted too, that there 'll be one to take my place,

an' do better for 'em all than ever I've had the sense to do. For forty heads plannin', an' forty hearts achin' at once for the sorrow of it all, ain't a beginnin' of what's needed, an' so it's lucky the Lord's got it all in charge an' no need to fret. But you with money — ah, you with money! It's double He wants of you. The heart to feel, an' the hand to give, an' the mind to work on, for them that's tied hand an' foot in sin an' misery, an' no sense to cut the knots for themselves. The gold 'll canker that lies idle or goes into show so long as there's men to be saved. I won't say you've no right to your ease, an' there's many a rich man works harder'n his hardest worked workman; but don't you forget — an' it's you that won't — that it's lent, an' you've got to own up to all the ways it went. You can't carry the world on your shoulders, — that's the Lord's business; but you've got to lift the burdens of them that's nearest, an' when each one will be doin' that, sure the millennium's on the way, an' maybe begun. There's no more story for me outside o' that, an' I'm not even wantin' they should call it the McAuley Mission. It's Jesus Christ's mission; an' me, that he saved, is good for nought but to keep a hand out to all the rest that's floundering round the way I was, an' to know that's why he's held me up, an' given me the chance. May he open your eyes full, so you 'll know all I mean, an' come into his kingdom, that you're just on the edge of now."

Miss Marcia crept down an hour before dinner, and found Mrs. Herndon sitting in the library, so lost in thought that she started as a hand touched hers in passing.

"You need not talk," Miss Marcia said, as a sudden flicker from the open fire showed Margaret's pale, absorbed face. She roused now, and moved near

enough to take the hand that for a moment she carried to her lips.

"I meant to come up," she said; "but I was thinking of Jerry, and — some other things."

"I wish I could understand what possible place he has in your scheme," Miss Marcia said, after a moment's pause. There were other questions she longed to ask; but if Margaret preferred silence she should bide her time. "He is just as likely to turn out a fraud, you know; and even if he does not, you do not believe in his theories of conversion. It can't be possible you are beginning to agree with him?"

"Do you remember Browning?" Margaret answered.

> "'The world will not believe a man repents,
> And this wise world of ours is mainly right.
> Full seldom *does* a man repent, or use
> Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch
> Of blood and custom wholly out of him,
> And make all clean, and plant himself afresh.'"

"Then you are certain he is planted afresh?"

"Twelve years is a fair test."

Miss Marcia sighed. "Well, dear, if you get any comfort out of it, I have nothing to say. We all have our wandering time, and we must all find our way as we can back to the Father's house; and if his path leads there, that is all that is necessary."

"You shall go to the Mission when you are stronger, and by and by I am going to tell you his story. It all fits into the rest of my puzzle. A year ago I would not have dreamed that I could believe again. I called myself agnostic, and put away speculation. Now, in many ways, from undreamed-of sources, the same testimony comes. Lessing and his life, Meg, Herbert Longshore and Lennox, Miss Biggs, and this McAuley, with his passionate desire to help, — it is all one and the same; a love

that means the only regeneration for the world, and that will redeem us all. I hold to that, and am satisfied."

"You are sad, child, in spite of your faith," Miss Marcia said involuntarily, her delicate old cheeks coloring as she spoke. "I don't mean to intrude, dear."

"I shall talk to you soon," Margaret answered, after a pause in which she had held the hand more closely. "I am not quite sure of myself yet. But you must remember, for me, that an unsatisfied life is infinitely better than a dissatisfied one. I know my work and my place. I know precisely what to do with my money. I decline to be a single stream. I prefer the irrigation system. The fountain will have unending small outlets, and the fields will bless it, and small creatures will live their small lives in the green places made for them, and I shall watch them and learn from them more than I shall ever teach. A year ago I longed to die. Even now there are minutes when my courage fails ; but to-day I am glad, — I thank God that I may live and work and wait; and if I cannot have all I want, why should I demand more than others? 'The things that are surely for thee gravitate to thee.' There it all is, dear, — a word I carry with me, and have read to pieces." And Margaret took a scrap of newspaper from her pocket-book and half read, half repeated, —

"Serene, I fold my hands and wait,
Nor care for wind nor tide nor sea ;
I rave no more 'gainst time and fate,
For, lo ! my own shall come to me.

"I stay my haste, I make delays ;
For what avails this eager pace ?
I stand amid the eternal ways,
And what is mine shall know my face."

The clear, pathetic voice went on to the end, a ring of triumph as the last words sounded, —

> "'The stars come nightly to the sky,
> The tidal wave unto the sea ;
> Nor time nor space, nor deep nor high,
> Can keep my own away from me."

The tears were running down Miss Marcia's face.

"Dear child, I want you to be happy *now*. There is n't any real reason why you cannot be."

"I shall tell you to-morrow," Margaret said, after an instant, in which she grew very pale. "I want you to know it all, and you shall."

XXVI.

"I SUPPOSE nothing could well be in more shocking taste than to open my house to the Ultimates, and then use my own walls as the barricade from the shelter of which I am to fire at pleasure. What will Mr. J. B. P. W. Hurst say, — he and his attendant satellites, — and what will be left of me when his verdict is rendered?"

The tone was jesting, but there was a slight anxiety in Mrs. Herndon's face as she glanced at the little pile of manuscript on the library table.

"It has grown beyond all bounds," she went on, "and yet I hardly see how to help it. It feels presumptuous. I have no wish to sit in judgment, and yet it is inevitably an arraignment, and one that I am neither old enough nor wise enough to be justified in making. I want your full mind, my friend."

Mr. Featherstone's haggard, strangely eager face turned toward her. He had been leaning back in the great arm-chair, resting from the exertion of getting there, and his wife watched him anxiously as he sank back and closed his eyes. He still went out daily, but grave difficulties had developed with startling suddenness. The busy, absorbed life had given no room for yielding; but there had been suffering, borne silently and almost unheeded, that had sapped the springs and weakened resistance, the effects of which came now, for the first time, to the surface. Hope for the future was far more uncertain than had seemed possible; and Dr. Strothers gave himself to the case with an energy that, for the time,

sent his own perplexities to the background. Work had never been more pressing; and he blessed it as he came and went, still resolved, but waiting for the moment that might be seized.

"It is a sick man's persistent fancy," Mrs. Featherstone had said, as she beckoned Mrs. Herndon to the window. "Don't oppose his wish, even if it seems a little unreasonable. He dwells on this meeting with a curious pertinacity, as if it were of strenuous importance; and he wants to hear what you have said, and to suggest, perhaps, if you have ignored or softened statements that ought to be made. It is unreasonable, of course, but I know you will not refuse."

It had not been an easy task. These sad eyes, fixed steadily upon her as she read, lighting at moments as he felt the power of earnest words, and fading again into the sombre melancholy that of late had filled them, demanded all comfort that love could bring. Mrs. Herndon's own, as she went on, had filled more than once with tears, brushed hastily away.

"Forgotten Debts," she had called her paper; and it told, simply as she would have spoken, the story of her own thought in the years that had gone, and what measure of obligation she had come to feel as the demand lying in the gift of life. Reticent, yet with the power of deepest conviction on every page, it ended with a sudden, impassioned appeal for the recognition of the spiritual forces ignored by modern thought for faith and love, and a certainty that where their rule began, began also blessedness better than any happiness.

"Criticise its thought all you will," she said, in the beginning; "but remember that I have no literary expression, and have written this as I would speak to you if I were trying to make the year plain."

"If this is the result of having 'no literary expression,' let us give thanks that it has been denied," Mr. Featherstone said, as she ended. "I have preached some of the things that you say there, but they never made any impression. My people took only my critical side, and ignored any constructive work I sought to hint. Here, together, no platform to silence them, and this word to rouse, perhaps for once we may get at the demand of life, and a stronger word come to me than I have spoken. It is my farewell. I shall never speak again."

"Get well, and you will change your mind," Mrs. Herndon said, as she took the thin hand he had stretched out. "Dear friend, you shall not reproach yourself so. Not one of us but has felt what purpose you wished for us, and what ruled your own life. You are too ill and worn to judge or know what you have really done."

He made no reply as he turned away and moved slowly and feebly toward the waiting carriage; and Mrs. Herndon looked after him with a sharp pang, as she thought how suddenly this change had come, and wondered if he could live through a winter voyage across the sea. She put away the manuscript, and went up to Miss Marcia, whose rheumatism was still aggressive, and who had determined to be well enough to go downstairs the evening on which the Ultimates were to assemble; and they read together till Miss Erminia came in, more cheerful than usual, and full of the story of the afternoon.

Lessing had made no objection when asked if he would be present, and perhaps speak to these people, who might listen or not, as the mood took them.

"Why not?" he said, as Heilbrun protested angrily: "So you go to make yourself a show for fools. What word have you for such as they? and why will you always have faith that some may hear?"

"Why not?" Lessing repeated. "Who has done best work but men you would say had no ears for the true thought? This Longshore, who always made money and money; this Lennox, who knows justice as no one I have seen; and the woman who gives always, and seeks always how most wisely to give. Day by day the thought grows, and how know I what soul may be waiting for a word that shall open eyes and make plain the way for one more to work?"

"Go, then, dreamer," Heilbrun said, still irritably, but with a softening in the fierce eyes. "It may be you have right, and that my thought is a dream; but wait and see."

The week had brought many complications. A sudden turn in events had shown Lennox that Harkness was more to be dreaded than he had thought; and he had hurried in to Longshore, who listened indignantly to the story. Business had been turned aside from them, one of their most profitable customers having been persuaded to try the Harkness & Co. goods; and there was a sudden falling off in orders which was ominous, while much that had been sent out on commission was returning to them.

"He 's bound to sweep the board clean," Lennox said, as he ended the tale. "Do you feel as if you could make fight straight ahead? Bert, it will be hard on you if putting out your hand to help is going to tangle you in knots one man can't cut."

"One man may miss it where two or three would make short work. No worrying, Frank. I 'll see you to-morrow, or next day at latest, and, in the mean time, I have a plan that will work."

Lennox went home reassured; and Mr. Longshore drove straight to the house of Mr. Hammersmith, who received him with politely veiled amazement, which increased when he heard that a private interview was desired.

"Business, my dear sir?" he said. "Business and I have nothing to do with each other. My agent collects my rents and looks after matters in general, and I never allow him to discuss them with me. 'If I did not trust you, I should not employ you,' I say; 'and freedom from thoughts of that nature is all that I require.' Business in any ordinary sense is abhorrent to me. Its laws and methods are opposed to my convictions; and as I have no power to alter them, I sink myself in my pursuits, and forget, as far as possible, my differences with the world."

Mr. Hammersmith paused, and looked inquiringly at Mr. Longshore, who had listened to him with some surprise at greater freedom of speech than he had ever before heard from him. The impassive shadow of a man had convictions, then, and Dr. Strothers was right.

"Suppose you let me tell you things just as they come," he said. "It's a rather long story, but I don't see how to make my points clear unless I go over the whole ground."

"By all means," Mr. Hammersmith answered courteously, his glance straying toward a small and many-sealed packet, presumably containing a coin ordered months ago, and for which he had searched in vain in American collections. Longshore, like all these millionnaires, probably had some project, — a railroad, or mine, or bonanza of some sort; safe enough, for he was not one to take risks, but entirely out of his own line.

"He won't persuade me into any foolery," Mr. Hammersmith said inwardly, with another glance at the package, and then looked steadily at the speaker's face. It was a long story; for, somewhat to his own surprise, as Mr. Hammersmith listened with more and more attention, Mr. Longshore found that not only Lennox was being described, but Lessing,

and Mrs. Herndon's work, and even Miss Biggs and her share in it.

"It seems absurd," he ended, a little embarrassed, and yet reassured, by the quality of Mr. Hammersmith's silence, — "it certainly seems absurd that this should take the character of a personal statement of opinion, and the reasons for the change in my thought. I am settled in my own mind. I shall fight this monopoly, or any other injustice that comes in my way. I won't go out of my way, else there would be no end. In fact, I'm not sure there's an end anywhere. Strothers seems to think that your sympathies are with justice, and that you would be inclined to help along a fight if you saw it meant victory, — perhaps even if it did n't."

"Strothers thinks so, does he?" Mr. Hammersmith murmured, a slight smile crossing his dark face. "He thinks so, eh? Well, he is n't far from right. For one who has refused to listen to business I have had a full day. This is my second interview since this morning. My first was with Harkness, and my second is with the man he wants to crush. Sit down, sir," — for Mr. Longshore had sprung up with an astonished exclamation. "Harkness is a second cousin of my wife, and has had an eye on my money for some time. He is a plausible fellow, and not bad company; but I have no interest in his methods or his principles. In fact, sir, I detest them both. He looks upon Lennox as a very small fly on a very large wheel, and considers you criminal in having prevented his being brushed out of sight long ago. He is the more stirred up at present because his New York agent and himself have had a serious difference, and the man has thrown up the place. I'm telling no tales out of school, for I made no promises. I advise you to go straight to this man and secure his services. He knows every in and out,

and will defeat Harkness and his plans with more ease than any other combination could."

"You 're sure it 's all fair and square," Mr. Longshore said uneasily. "He has actually left? I want no over-reaching; nor do I want to take on a man who may get what he wants out of me and then go over to the enemy, or whose own aims are not in harmony with mine. In other words, there is something besides business to be considered."

Mr. Hammersmith nodded assent.

"He left Harkness because he was putting the screw on too tight, — ruining some young fellow or other who, with a little consideration, might have pulled through his difficulties. You 'll find it a chance in a thousand, as I can see things. With his experience I doubt if you will need other backing. If you should, I am at your service, and I shall be obliged if you will let me see the workings of your plans. Do you propose to put your own workmen in this village, or leave them in your houses?"

"That is hardly decided, and is likely to settle itself. My present foreman, McCullum, will go there in the spring to oversee men in the box department. I am adding to the mill, and I imagine some of his various cousins will follow. They are all Scotch, and clannish. I make no new plans, for they are developing of themselves faster than I can attend to them. This *rôle* of employer was not in my line in the least, but I cannot shirk it now that it is thrust upon me."

"You don't look like a reformer," Mr. Hammersmith said with a slight smile; "but you are likely to accomplish a good deal more than if you did. No thanks; they are quite unnecessary," he said impatiently, as Mr. Longshore said some words of acknowledgment. "I may not be needed at all, and if I am you have simply to state how." And the little gentleman waved out his visitor, and made haste to

remove the wrappings from his latest treasure, talking of it through the evening, with no hint to his unsuspecting wife that the most important member of her family had that afternoon received a checkmate that ended his game once for all, so far as his latest opponents were concerned. A week passed before Harkness discovered the situation; and after the first burst of rage at the trap sprung upon him, he wrote at once to Proctor, the new agent, an offer of double the salary given before, and a chance at some inside methods of increasing it, if he would resign the position he had taken.

"You 'll smash with the rest of them, if you are too blind to see which side your bread is buttered," he ended. "It 's throwing good brains away to waste them on a set of lunatic experimenters, and even Longshore's pocket is n't bottomless. It 's one against a corporation; and you know, and I know, and every fool knows, that the corporation is bound to win. Come back to your place, and we will have no words about it."

Proctor smiled as he read the letter, and then tossed it into the grate, — a compact little man, with cool gray eyes and a determined chin.

"It is too late, my friend," he said, "and I should n't wonder if you found that more than one corporation is possible. It 's a case where there 's no compromising. He 's a good fellow up to a certain point, and beyond that he 's a brute. I 'll send him a formal regret." And Proctor smiled grimly as he wrote, —

"Mr. Proctor regrets that a previous engagement will prevent his accepting Mr. Harkness's very agreeable invitation for January."

Mr. Harkness turned purple as he read. He was a man of no concealments, he had often said. What

he felt and thought he let folks know, and there was no question that day as to the character of both. His clerks cringed, and even his customers quailed before the mighty man, whose eyes shot flames, and from whose chest rumbled out deep oaths as he strode up and down the office. That night and for many nights thereafter he gave the hours to deep scheming and meditations on all methods of wiping from the face of the earth this audacious and insolent interference with his rights; but not in that night, nor any night to come, did methods announce themselves. The manufacturer had met his match, and the game was over.

Mr. Hammersmith was right. His assistance was not needed; but as the winter went on, orders pouring in beyond any capacity of the mill to fill them, his interest grew day by day, till, of his own free will, he urged at last his own admission to the company, and, as the new buildings rose, gave much time to charmed inspection of their merits. The village was growing also, and must have a library and reading-room, and some provision for amusement; and in this portion of the undertaking he had joined hands with Mrs. Herndon, and studied plans for a building, which must be severely simple, yet include many possibilities. The place should under no circumstances be a show-place. As far as might be, the men were to be left to themselves, and the opportunities they might use were never to be made compulsory ones. The small houses had each their plot of ground, and it was meant that each man who had proved a faithful workman should be enabled to own his home in the end. The old houses had been bought in, and were pulled down in spite of appeals that they might stand, their age entitling them to consideration.

"That is precisely the reason why they must go,"

Lennox said firmly. "They are steeped in corruption only second to that of a city tenement-house. We must start afresh. I can't have even a chance of the fever poison we have had to fight."

As drainage and road-making went on, they had planted, in late fall, long avenues, of young elms, maples, and lindens. In time the new village would come to the fame of the old, whose trees were the pride of every old inhabitant. Under the great sycamores which had shadowed the two houses, two cottages were rising, in one of which Mr. Hammersmith proposed to spend a portion of his time. This library should be perfect of its kind; and though circumstances unhappily prevented him from taking a position as librarian, he had already selected that officer, — a young law-student who needed the country, and who would not object to such occupation for his evenings, and whose future was already mapped out by his kinsman. The young man's talent was unquestioned; his sympathies were with precisely such workers; and the young teacher, who waited for him with a patience born of experience as well as faith, fitted into this scheme more thoroughly than she could have fitted anywhere else.

"You will all be lunatics together," Mrs. Hammersmith said, with deep indignation; but it cooled gradually as she found what delight was born of it for the husband she had sighed over as hopelessly given to melancholy. Her own fortune was an independent one. They had no children, and her own relatives needed but little assistance. Perhaps this method of disposing of a portion would do no harm; and she watched suspiciously, but with growing interest, the wild people who were given over to their own devices. The sombre little man labored indefatigably at his lists and prospective catalogue; and Lennox, who had at first feared that his minute and fussy methods

would make him a nuisance, rejoiced in his absorption, and congratulated himself that this phase of the work was in enthusiastic and competent hands. The village of his dream was growing before his eyes; and as, day by day, he came and went among his people, he watched the pretty chapel, owning no denominational name, with a longing for the time when under one roof each and all might join in the thanksgiving service already in his heart, and voicing itself in many an involuntary "Thank God," as he saw the vision accomplishing itself. Not the least interested among their visitors was McAuley, who had listened to Mrs. Herndon's story of the work going on there with quiet satisfaction, nodding contentedly at each phase described.

"The Lord Jesus was a carpenter," he said, "an' worked at his trade with the rest of 'em. It 's what he 'd wanted then, and he wants it now, — a fair show for every man that 's tryin' to live right, an' a chance for them that is n't. But maybe it 's a place that leaves him out, an' that would n't let him in if he came an' asked even."

He shook his head with grave reproach as he spoke. A curious friendship had grown up between the two.

"You 're one o' mine, in spite of yourself," he said at times. "You, turning your back on the most precious thing the world 's got, an' yet sayin' it 's all for love, an' you believe in God. If ye believe in him, believe also in me. Was n't that what he said, an' how 're ye goin' to get round it? If you work for the world an' to save, why won't you do it in the Lord's own way?"

"Let me work as I can," Mrs. Herndon said. "God is real to me too. If there is more to come it will come."

"Not if you 're content enough with the way you are," McAuley said. "There 's times, when I see the

look of you, that I says that, in some way I can't see, the Lord Jesus is there somehow; an' I've said the same of Meg, that won't come near us now, but only says she loves God and knows he helped her. Times when I can't sleep, I pray your eyes may be opened, an' your feet set in the right way; an' it's driven into me that they will be. I wish I might see it soon, but maybe you'll think more of it when I'm gone than you're willin' to now. You've helped many, an' you'll help more, an' the Lord won't leave you to yourself. Are they all o' your way o' thinkin' out there?"

"Mrs. Lennox was a Methodist and he a Swedenborgian; and that is all I know," Mrs. Herndon said, and smiled as she saw the sudden light on McAuley's face. "They are all good people, Jerry, and they mean to leave the world better than they found it."

"It's small matter to me what they call themselves, as long as the Lord's work gets done," he said emphatically. "There's no talk o' sects down in the Mission, an' the word won't be when you get up there, 'Was you Baptist, Methodist, or what?' but — 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one o' the least of these, ye have done it unto me.' Think on him, an' the love of him, an' see if it won't get plainer." And he went away, still shaking his head over the blindness that lacked so little of clear seeing. It was plain that his hold of life was weakening; and Mrs. Herndon sighed, and then smiled as she thought of what the little Mission had come to mean, — its absurdities, its pathos, even its occasional dogmatism, all glorified by the love that ruled there, and that gave daily testimony to the regenerating power of this force straight from heaven. Miss Biggs had gone down to it curious to know why Mrs. Herndon should be interested in such a place, and sat there at last, the tears running unheeded over her long face.

"'T ain't that I agree with their fire and brimstone," she said, "though that 's only a way o' putting what folks have got to go through with in their minds if they 're stiff-necked an' will go wrong whether or no. An' for all I know, there 's spiritual whippin'-posts, an' things to match, for the kind that won't attend to anything but posts an' such. But these poor critters has to be skeered a little, though, far 's I can see, it 's because they find out that there 's a chance for 'em, no matter what they 've done, that just weakens 'em right down. I 'm goin' every once in a while, just to get it rubbed in over again, that there ain't anything so bad that it 's worth while to be discouraged over it. There 's all ways o' settin' up the kingdom o' heaven down here," she said, when a flying visit to the new village had been added to her experiences; "but there ain't a better chance for it on all this planet than 's going to be out there, if folks only keep along, nat'ral an' quiet, an' no fuss, the way they 're doing now. To think that the Lord lets me have a hand in it is most too much for Amanda; but she 'll live up to her privileges fast as she can, an' that 's the most that he expects o' folks ever, any time."

Mrs. Longshore, too, had had her turn. One visit had been sufficient to enlist all her sympathies. She found Mrs. Lennox delightful, and every plan full of what was good, even when she failed to understand it. The mill was no moth, eating up wealth that still was, as it would remain, a possession so dear that she held to it with a tenacity that nothing had yet had power to lessen. It was another source of wealth; and she looked at her husband with adoring eyes, wondering how the miserable season of rupture and stubborn, angry opposition had ever been possible. It was comforting to attribute it all to her physical state; but the memory remained, and she berated her own stupidity more heartily with every week.

"You did n't know that your mother was a wicked little idiot, you blessed baby!" was her first address to the son that with March winds and the first crocuses had come to them, and at whom his father gazed with wonder tempered by profound appreciation.

"He 's a singular color," he said, "and as ancient in appearance as a small ape. He could easily be his own great-grandfather. Suppose he should be, Sally?" he added, with a sudden vague reminiscence of the possibilities of re-incarnation. "He is n't natural, I 'm sure."

"No; but I know who is," Mrs. Longshore said with deep disdain. "I should think you 'd remember, Bert, how you looked yourself. No, not exactly that; but you 've certainly seen plenty of babies, and ought to know more than you seem to. The worse they look in the beginning, the better it is in the end. I 'm perfectly certain he 's going to be beautiful if — Oh, Bert, if he will only not die! He won't; he can't! Don't you know little Harry was white in the very beginning, and never looked like little babies? Oh, what a comfort it is to think this one is red as any lobster!" And Mrs. Longshore cried a little, and then settled back in her pillows, content to gaze on the wrinkled and squirming little hands that refused to remain under cover.

"He 'll be a usurer, — a greedy, grasping usurer," his father said, "stretching out at this age for anything he can grab."

"I don't care what he is, if he 'll only be as good as his father," Mrs. Longshore said; "and I 'm so thankful that he came in March, for I had an awful feeling that perhaps his birthday would be the first of April. It would have ruined all his prospects in life, you know. I don't care what a man might be or do, or anything; the day would always be a millstone round his neck. That 's the reason that Uncle

Worthington never came to anything. Laugh as much as you like, Bert. He said so himself. 'How do you expect a man to take life seriously,' he said, 'that began it as a joke, and has never been able to see anything else in it?' and he never did. But this precious won't have to say dreadful things like that, — no, never!" And Mrs. Longshore looked indignantly at her laughing husband, and buried her face in the roll of drapery he had put in her arms. For her the winter had ended in a happiness so absorbing that she trembled at moments as she thought how little she had deserved it.

"I 'm going to be good. I 've got to be good, — better than I ever was before, on account of the baby, you know," she said to Margaret, whose face was serene and calm, and for whom changes even greater had come: one of them a secret never to be shared save with two, — one, him to whom its unfolding had been the solution of a mystery, short-lived, but well-nigh unendurable while it lasted; the other, the old friend whose love had claimed it, and whose silence was certain.

XXVII.

THE busy morning had ended; and Simmons shook his head disgustedly as Mrs. Herndon left the reception-room, carrying with her the letters which had come in by the noon delivery. Miss Marcia's door was closed; and she passed it with a sigh of relief, Simmons watching her progress up the stairs, and turning away to his work as he saw her pause for a moment.

"Dere's something wrong," he muttered, brushing angrily at a suggestion of mud left by some careless foot. "Dere ain't no one 'pears to take notice; but she hain't been de same not for a month or two, an' I 'd like to know what it means. De doctor 's sent flyin', an' she gettin' mighty thin an' peaked; an' de good Lord only knows what sense dere is in such goin's on, when everything might be just as joyful as a 'possum in 'simmon time. Seems like as if somebody might better interfere; an' de nex' question am, Who 's got de right? Dis thing can't go on; an' Simmons, he 's jest obliged to do somethin' if dere ain't no one else to take hold. Ole Miss, now," — for by this disrespectful term Simmons designated Miss Erminia, whose place in his esteem had lessened seriously, — "if she 'd keep out o' de way, dere 'd be a chance, maybe, an' him lookin' at her with all his eyes, an' never allowed a word, an' she not seemin' to see, an' always leavin' him to de ole ladies. It means some mischief, and who 's goin' to find out what?" And Simmons

dropped his brush and sat down on the rug to consider the situation.

Mrs. Herndon went slowly to her room, still holding the letters, and drew a low chair nearer the fire. A package lay on the table ; and she opened it, smiling as she saw a carved bracket on which Felix had been spending much time, and which he had left at the door that morning, utterly unable to wait until Christmas. He had copied a simple design of Lessing's, bungling here and there, but, on the whole, successful.

"It is plain what he is likely to be," she thought. "Every instinct in him seems artistic, and it will be the happiest life. I am glad it comes so naturally, and it is his life with Lessing that will bring it about. I wish other lives might know their lines as easily."

She shivered a little as she sat there, and laid her head against the back of the chair, closing her eyes as she did so. Simmons was right. She had grown thinner. She was always pale ; but it had been the clear paleness of health, a faint color stealing always to her cheek as she talked or became interested, — a different thing from the pallor evident now as the light fell full upon her face.

She roused presently and sat erect, as if to shame her own weakness.

"There is no more reason for giving up to-day than many another day has held," she said, half aloud, and then was silent again, the clear eyes shadowed by troubled thought.

"'And what is mine shall know my face,'" she murmured at last. "I thought that last night, I believe it to-day; yet down I go into that pit from which I was digged. When a faith better than anything in my past is here, — when, as I do more and more, I feel strength and calm about me, even if I

cannot fully make it mine, — why must longing overstep bounds and sap power to do? It shall not."

The lips were resolute; the eyes defied memory and desire, but still the thought went on.

"I had settled it all so entirely. I was so content, so blessed in at last living my own life as I would. I am content even now when I remember the gain that is mine. But there is something in me that repels happiness. Life has always denied me what it seemed so natural to expect. The fault is in me. I have never been reasonable; perhaps I never shall be reasonable till denial has made me so. But at least I will not be denied the work and hope that is my strength and peace."

Peace? It was hardly peace that looked from the clear, pathetic eyes, or rested on the sweet lips set with pain. A tear fell presently, and she started as if guilty of some sudden offence.

"Be done with self-pity, Margaret! You ended that long ago," she said resolutely, and took up the letters that had lain unheeded. Two or three business notes, various yellow envelopes with the usual request for a small loan or a little gift which could not be missed from the wealth in which she rolled, and, last, a heavy envelope addressed in the handwriting of Mr. Savage Logan. Margaret's eyes were full of terror. Her fingers were strangely powerless as she tried to open the envelope; her hands shook, and a gray paleness had settled on her face.

"My God! my God!" she said, low. "How shall I bear it if it is what I think?"

The thick paper yielded to the trembling fingers, and an enclosure fell in her lap. She unfolded the square sheet in which it had lain, and read the few words it contained.

My dear Madam, — The South American mail brings me a packet which I forward at once. Should any action upon it be desirable, I am, as usual, at your orders.

Very respectfully yours,

Savage Logan.

Was it minutes or hours that she sat there, no sign of conflict in the motionless figure that at last stirred and pushed back heavy hair and turned a colorless face to the sunshine streaming in and enveloping her as she sat? She took up the letter and started as she saw that the writing was not that which she had expected to see; and when she had opened it and read for a moment, she sprang to her feet with a stifled cry, which, if it held fear and awe, held also a sudden joy under which every sense reeled and became dim. She slipped silently to the floor, and her head lay on the chair, but she had not fainted. Tears came in floods, and ended the cruel tension; and she stretched out her arms once more with a murmur of inarticulate thanksgiving. Color and life had come back. From the dark eyes looked out a pity wellnigh infinite, yet a something almost rapture, that as it faded held still a promise of some certain joy. Up and down the room she moved, swiftly and silently, her hands clasped behind her as in the childish days when she paced by the old Squire's side. Her lips moved, but no sound came from them, and tears were falling still, — a tender shower full of healing. She sat down at last and read the letter again, and looked at a newspaper slip that it contained, then rose and put both away in a private drawer of her desk.

"Thanks are poor things," she murmured; "but, my God, my life is thine, and all that can ever come into it."

She had bathed her face and made some change in her dress before Simmons tapped at the door, and

she opened it with a look before which he stood dumb. Mrs. Herndon smiled.

"It is lunch, I suppose, Simmons?"

"Fo' de Lawd!" Simmons muttered, returning to the dialect of his youth. "Dere 's been a resurrection for shuah. I ask your pardon, Miss Margaret. You was lookin' mighty bad dis yer mawnin', an' I was glad to see de change done come on. I done tole de ole ladies; an' Miss Marshy, she 's on de way down."

Simmons looked at his mistress with eager question as she went quietly down the stairs, and lost his head more than once as the lunch went on, offering pepper for sugar to Miss Erminia, and carrying the bread twice around the table before it occurred to him that Miss Marcia had asked for some. Miss Erminia was radiant. She had spent the morning at the Hygienic Home, and met there a young Hindu investigating American institutions, and watching with inscrutable gravity the mysterious methods of this special form. With him was a no less inscrutable Englishman, with an ear-trumpet, who came home each day precisely at eleven o'clock, and, seating himself in the centre of the parlor, drank a pint of boiling water, pausing at intervals to wave his trumpet invitingly toward whoever approached him. Miss Erminia had dropped in a remark or two, long experience with Captain Drummond having robbed the operation of the terrors hedging it about for unaccustomed souls; and he answered with a detailed account of his conversion to Buddhism, and his theory of the universe in general. Unhappily, Miss Erminia had been obliged to leave before more than a prelude had been given; but she had settled with Mrs. Newcome to lunch there the next day and hear all that she had lost to-day, and life again held for her an untried possibility.

"I can't understand your indifference to such opportunities, Margaret," she said finally. "Here is an opening into a knowledge that I have certainly, some time or other, heard you say meant the only rational way of looking at life. Or perhaps it may have been Mrs. Newcome; but that makes no difference. Your apathy is most extraordinary."

"Precisely what would you like to have me do, Cousin Erminia?"

"I think you ought to reflect upon Nirvana, Margaret, and ask yourself if that sublime repose is not better than the horrible fuss and fret of the life we are forced to live."

"I am perfectly willing to ask, and to reflect also, Cousin Erminia; but who is going to answer me?"

"I am," returned Miss Erminia, impressively. "It came to me like a flash, Margaret, while I was riding up in the horse-car; and, for some singular reason, things often do come to me in a horse-car. I think it must be the sudden jerks that do it. It came over me that absorption must necessarily be the end of life. It is so with the natural world, you know; and I reflected on sun and rain, and how they are taken into the inmost earth-being, and then on several forms of absorption, till I saw it was really the natural destiny of man, only he has missed it somehow. I shall examine the subject very thoroughly. Mr. Chudder's conversation is really startlingly instructive, and one gets so much more distinct an impression from spoken words than from any number of printed ones. I really feel a powerful drawing toward the whole delightful theory."

"Wish 't would draw her clean out o' de house," Simmons said to himself, as he watched her discontentedly. "Nebber seed sich a change in a year; but I reckon it 's because she was flyin' round so last year that dere was n't time to sense her, anyhow.

Miss Marshy, she 's a-lookin' an' wonderin' if she 'll git a chance for a word edgewise, an' she won't if Ole Miss can help it; an' Miss Margaret, she 's a-lookin' one minute as if she was pitiful enough to be cut in mince-meat for folks, an' de next joyful, like she was when de door opened an' I see her face a-shinin' fit to knock me down, like de shinin' ones upsot de soldiers at de sepulchre. Somethin' new 's a-comin' to dis yer house, an' Simmons says praise an' thanks to think he 's lived to see it, whatever it is; for 't ain't nothin' but good."

Miss Marcia went into the library, hoping for a word or two with Margaret, whose face she had been watching quietly; but Miss Erminia followed, and Nirvana had the floor till the bell rang and callers were announced. Margaret went out as soon as possible after they had left, and after a long walk up the Avenue stopped on the way home for a few minutes in the Academy. Dr. Strothers was on his way down the stairs as she entered, and drew back for an instant as he saw her. Repulse had been so marked of late that he was sore, and at moments doubted if it would not be better never to see her again than, seeing her, to find the old friendliness changed into shrinking and something almost like antagonism. There was no time now for more than a word, for he was hastening to keep an appointment; but as he paused for a moment, looking at her gravely before he took the extended hand, his face cleared and a warm flush shot up to his temples. It was not the old Margaret whose eyes met his for an instant, inscrutable still, yet with a look at which his heart leaped; nor yet was it that later Margaret who had evaded and irritated and wounded him past all bearing. She did not speak; and when he reached the street he remembered that neither had he, and that a girl who had passed them on the stairs had looked at both of them

curiously and half smiled, as if experience told her that here was a misunderstanding. Margaret went up to the main gallery, and sat down opposite the picture she had come to see, — a deserted camping-ground in far northern woods, — but she faced it with unseeing eyes, looking from it presently to one which had brought a thrill of pain as it first met her view. It was a walk in the Jardin des Plantes, — the walk down which, on a day in those years that seemed now no part or possibility of her own life, William Herndon had led her to this very bench under the lime-tree. She remembered the scent of the blossoms this moment. There was nothing else that she had wanted to remember; but she sat there now, her eyes filled with tender pity, looking at the children in the picture as if she were one of them, and felt their life more really than she could her own.

"I think there can never be misunderstanding any more," she thought. "No matter for the rest if only that may pass, and I dare to take the good I have had to put away."

The girl who had passed them on the stairs had made the circuit of the gallery, and sat down now at a point where she could watch the face that had so attracted her, and presently, screened behind her muff, made a rapid sketch on a little block she carried. It was mysterious that such eyes should rest absorbedly on this absurd picture after the worst manner of Fortuny, which no one with any real sense of art would tolerate for a moment; but the absorption itself was a boon, and the young artist worked on, more and more eager to fix the look which had at first attracted her. Margaret turned presently with the sudden and uneasy consciousness born of the sense that stranger eyes are searching deeper than the surface, and for a moment, as she detected what had been going on, looked half indignant. The girl flushed hotly, but came

forward with a simplicity and eagerness that at once disarmed her.

"If you knew how I had been wanting just such a face," she said, "I am sure you would forgive me for stealing what I could not let go without trying to fix it."

"We are all thieves in one way or another," Mrs. Herndon answered, with a smile; "and so I have nothing to say, and indeed am glad if I have anything to give. That is what we are for, you know, though I should seldom wish it to take this form."

"Oh, but it should!" the girl cried enthusiastically. "I wish you would let me try to paint you. I can paint a little. There is a picture of mine here, and it is n't skied, either. Of course it is preposterous to think I could really do it. Women don't, somehow or other; but all I care for is the human. I will paint portraits before I die — real portraits of souls — if it takes my lifetime to learn how."

"Souls are apt to object, and the world has no right to them," Mrs. Herndon said. They were still standing, but moved back involuntarily to the sofa from which she had just risen, and their eyes met now in a frank scrutiny.

"It is the most perfect face. I must have it in color!" the girl cried. "If I could but get your eyes as they look this minute — so clear one would say they told everything, yet inscrutable as that Mona Lisa smile — oh! if I could get that look, I would give a year of my life!"

She had clasped her hands as she spoke, and sat there gazing at the face, still smiling, but which flushed a little under this purely impersonal scrutiny.

"You will think me quite out of my head," she went on; "but I have been working a long time at my picture, and never could get the eyes as I would; and when I caught yours, there was just the look.

It is the 'Lady of Shalott.' She had the right to turn. The curse was on her if she did, but that made no difference. She had the right, and not only that, but it *had to be*, don't you see, else it would not have been life at all? No matter if the web broke, and she lost; the gain came afterward: and if that is n't the way to read it, I don't care; it is my reading. Will you let me try to paint you? I am ——." And she gave a name that Margaret recognized instantly as one of the best among women artists.

"I am not quite sure that I want to be part of a picture," Margaret answered, after a pause. "You shall have the eyes, if they mean so much to you, but not the rest."

"But the strange thing is, that I have almost your face already. I must have seen it in a dream; for there you are, only different coloring, which I see now is all wrong. It may not come to anything. I despair over getting what I can see and feel, but I must try whether I can or not. Perhaps you do not even live in the city, and perhaps you think me a lunatic"

"Not in the slightest," Margaret said, as she put out her hand frankly. "You have done just what rational people will do more and more as time goes on, — used your intuition of what seems to you my personality, and spoken to me, and not my shell. We are so encased in wrappings of one sort and another — conventional, educational, and what not — that it is almost miraculous that the real soul ever frees itself and speaks with its own voice. True artists are less swathed than the most of us, though even they have their own limitations. Come and see me, and we will talk about it; or, if you are too busy, I will come to you, for I should like to know you."

"I am very far from sure that you will like it when you have gone a little farther; but it is a foretaste

of the millennium to have you ready to," the girl said, as they rose. It was a girlish face; yet now, as Margaret examined it closely, she saw that it was very nearly, if not quite, as old as her own; and that, in spite of the delicate coloring and the eager, shining eyes, sharp experience had left its lines, and sorrow dwelt with the bright spirit that looked from them. She had shrunk a little as she heard the subject of the picture; for how many times had she repeated, —

> "'I am half sick of shadows,' said
> The Lady of Shalott."

Yet, as she shrunk, the conviction came; shadows were ended. That mirror of the past might break as it would; the web her life had woven, part at will. The new life was hers; and if the knight rode by and no turning, still it was hers, — that new life which held consecration and high knowledge and all noble ends, and into which good must come, and only good, since all selfish aims had ceased, and she held herself ready for quiet acceptance of what the day might bring.

"'And what is mine shall see my face,' she said once more, a deep and quiet happiness entering in, and looking, unconsciously to herself, from the eyes that in that moment were not inscrutable.

"She is an angel," the artist said, as she went reluctantly to join some one who had entered and stood waiting impatiently; and Margaret left the building and walked as in a dream down the noisy Avenue. There had been self-reproach, even terror, at her own feeling as she read that morning the words that had brought her deliverance, but now it had all passed.

"I forgive it all," she said inwardly, as if some presence walked with her and waited her word; and for an instant she turned as if to meet imploring and

remorseful eyes. "It was all a terrible blunder, poor William, — the last, worst of all; but you know now, and are sorry for some of it. I am sorry, too; but I meant to be right. I never meant to do anything but right; only I was so young, and had so little knowledge. I have little now; I never felt myself so empty and ineffectual, yet I never felt myself so filled with divine possibility. It is as if a wave of the Infinite had suddenly flowed into my little land-locked lake, and given it tides, and its own drawing toward a power far yet near. It is happiness, and larger than any happiness words can ask."

"Come home with me, even if you can't stay but half an hour," a voice said; and Margaret turned to find her arm taken by Mrs. Featherstone, who looked anxious and careworn.

"I was thinking of you, for Mr. Featherstone said at lunch that he wished you would come, because you seemed to bring healing with you. I think you do, and more and more. You are growing so fast you will leave us all behind. Yet I don't understand how the sort of thing you persist in doing can mean growth."

"I am not sure that it does," Margaret said, "save that anything that takes one out of one's self must be growth in degree. But we won't discuss it in the car, in spite of the fact that it is a place which a good many people choose for confidences. I have listened to some extraordinary confessions made by people who never dreamed how plainly every word could be heard, but took it for granted that the noise shut all ears but their own."

Mrs. Featherstone smiled, but said nothing; and Margaret looked at her now and then as they rode up town, and wondered what fruit was to come from this new discipline of care and pain. Mr. Featherstone

was in his library, and held out his hand eagerly as Margaret entered, making a movement to rise, which his wife instantly checked.

"Margaret makes no demands," she said, "and you must keep quiet, for you need all your strength for that unpleasant man who will come to dinner. It is that dreadful English radical, B——, Margaret."

"Who is like nothing so much as a Chinese gong," said Mr. Featherstone. "He has his own tone, and can never be confounded with anything else; but it is one strident, pervading roar of personality, that sends all one's faculties to the winds. There are times when I lose myself hopelessly in the rush, and am simply borne whither I would not on this wave of blatant, surging sound. Let us be thankful that he has few duplicates."

He was looking intently at Margaret as he ended, and sighed faintly. Mrs. Featherstone had been called away while he spoke; and Margaret sat silent, shocked at the pallor of his face and the restless light in the eyes usually so cold and quiet.

"You look as if you had found treasure," he said suddenly. "Are you as much at rest as your face seems to say?"

Margaret flushed a little. Not even to him could she ever tell one revelation that the day had held. It was even doubtful to her own mind if it could be right to let any human being share it, though that point remained still unsettled. But the feeling that had taken possession of her had, after all, no necessary connection with this. It was not that light had come to her, so much as that she had suddenly opened her eyes to light that had been there from the beginning, only waiting her recognition; and as she thought this she spoke.

"I have been in the shadow needlessly, I think, as it seems to me most of us are. It is true that I

have come suddenly to full rest, but it is plain that I might have had it before."

"How? What is there in life that means rest?"

"Nothing in life from any mere external aspect, but everything when one touches its interior source."

"Does your burrowing among your poor bring it to you?"

"Hardly, though it has helped make myself plain to me. But I have come to some conclusions that I want to tell you, for you were right in part. You told me that mere alleviation was useless, and a waste of time and force, and I denied it; but it is true. Alleviation must be part of the work forever, for cases of special need; but this year has taught me that merely bettering the physical condition has no results beyond the moment. What the poor, even when most is given, get, is simply crumbs from the rich man's table, not full food. Till they have been shown how to grow, how to come to their spiritual inheritance, our labor is vain."

"Then there is a spiritual inheritance?"

"You have preached it. Have you ceased to believe it?"

"I believe that the collective force of all high humanity still lives. There have been moments in which I have believed that beyond that is an Infinite Force with consciousness of me and my needs; but, for the most part, I see only Nature and natural law, inexorable and passionless, holding me in a vice. You are exalted to-day. I have seen it coming, but you will not stay there. A feeling has no staying power. The indefinable can never hold you in quiet. What is it that you will cling to when the fervor of a moment of illumination is ended, and gray reality possesses you again?"

"There is no gray reality," Margaret said, after a moment, in which she met his sombre look. "How

can I call anything 'gray reality' when I see it shot through with divine light? The real things are all light. It is sin and struggle and suffering that are transient states, out of which we may 'pass and continue beyond.' It is presumption in me to be saying this to you, but the growing sense of it that I have had has suddenly crystallized. I see, as I never have in my life, as I never dreamed that I could, and I know as Dante knew, that it is —

> 'Light intellectual filled full of love,
> Love of true good filled full of joyfulness,
> A joyfulness transcending all things sweet.'"

"You call it divine, but you are mistaken. It is merely the passion of humanity, strong in you from the beginning, and simply taking deeper hold. When it seizes one as it has you, one could easily think it divine, but the exaltation and the rest both pass. Quiet will not stay."

"Is quiet the only thing to be desired?" Margaret said, after a pause. "It seems to me that while the sense of peace may be born, that it holds the intensest stimulus. The quiet of a mountain-top is to me the most satisfying thing that Nature has for me; but while I call it quiet, I am more conscious than under any other circumstances of unseen forces working with a resistless energy that takes my breath away, — yet a working so perfect, so harmonious, that it is practically rest. I am incoherent, I know, and fail to give you what I mean; but it seems to me that what we call rest is an ignoble thing compared with this sense of knowing universal ends and being allowed to make part in the great working scheme."

"In other words, you would obey natural law, and find your emancipation in this obedience."

"I cannot argue with you, for I am not wise, and you could confute and silence me with your philoso-

phies," Margaret said, with a little hesitation. "But has mere intelligence anything to do with it? The mind will tell you one thing where the soul tells another, and the 'light intellectual' is a bale-fire if it be not also 'light filled full of love.' I refuse to be shut in by what you call natural law. Under that law, and making it possible for such law to work, is spiritual law. Natural law leaves us slaves and thralls. Spiritual law makes us children of the light. If we are discontented after this revelation, it is a divine discontent that is our impetus forward. I want no Nirvana. I want conscious progress — more and more light and love — and I shall have it. It is my inheritance."

"I said so once; I am older than you by many years. I have worked out the problem patiently. Every power I own has gone into it, and I tell you that you are a dreamer, and speak of a dream — very lovely, very real, but none the less a dream from which you will awaken. Look at life as you must in the end. Your work is for humanity, and you are owed to their future, — not to any dream of what you yourself may reach."

"It is not so," Margaret said; and the pathetic, vibrant voice was sweet and strong, — "it is not so. If it were, blessedness could never be. Each generation would endlessly project itself into the life of the next, and the succession perpetuate the same thing. Light and love and knowledge and hope are all mine to-day, — in this hour that is. I wait for no future. It is already in the bottom of my heart. To-morrow may bring what it will, for it can bring only good. Love lives, and is the sea that bears me on. This thing you call the spirit of humanity is a miserable abstraction. It offers me no good that can make self-sacrifice rational or freeing. I will not have the meaningless, despairing, unsatisfying abstraction. I

will have what I have not known, yet have dimly felt after, and in moments half apprehended — no abstraction — no blind force — no collective spirit of humanity, but God, the Light that lighteth every one that cometh into the world."

The eyes were radiant, the pale face as the face of an angel. Mr. Featherstone had covered his eyes, his habitual attitude when thinking; and as he put out the thin, hot hand, and touched hers, she saw that they were filled with tears, and her own fell fast.

"You deserve everything that is good," she said. "All your life has been a consecration. Why must it be that you cannot feel what seems here this moment, — a love that is yours and that holds you fast?" She broke into sobs, but checked herself suddenly. "Forgive me. It is not sorrow except for you. Dear friend, you who have been so good to me, why will you not cease questioning and let light come in?"

"I shall soon know," he said. "I must wait. If there is a revelation, I am ready for it."

There were voices on the stairs as he spoke, and Margaret rose hastily.

"I shall try to come up to-morrow," she said. "Save all your strength for the evening and your Ultimates."

"My Ultimates have ceased to be mine," he said, with a faint smile. "Like everything else I have sought, they have eluded me. Kirk is the new president, and will find full satisfaction in administering their affairs. Good-by, Margaret. You have done me good."

He held her hand for a moment, and met her look, — her eyes tender, yearning, assuring; his full of uncertainty, and a sadness no words could touch, — then turned to meet the incoming guest. Tears were in

her eyes still as she went out, but quiet had not gone; and as she reached the Square, peace was with her, and a sense of joyful expectation, content to be denied, yet knowing that for its deepest longing the promise was sure, and good and only good her certain portion for all days to come.

XXVIII.

SATURDAY evening had come, and the long drawing-room, with its softly shaded but abundant light, flowers here and there, and the crackling fire burning with energetic cheer, held an aspect of festivity delighting the inmost soul of Simmons, who stood at different points to get the general effect, rubbing his hands and chuckling softly to himself. The library had been left in shadow; but there, too, the warm firelight flickered on wall and ceiling, bringing out the sheen of gilding on a book or a hint of color in the dark draperies.

> "'De year ob jubilee am come;
> Return, ye ransomed sinners, home,'"

Simmons sang under his breath, with the merest indication of a double shuffle, nipped in the first stages of its evolution. "Not dat dis yer family ought for to be spoken of like as if they was or'nary sinners, savin' an' exceptin' Ole Miss," Simmons went on, explaining his position to himself. "Miss Margaret ain't nothin' but an out-an'-out angel, an' Miss Marshy she 's a saint, an' Ole Simmons ain't fit for nothin' but jus' to loose the latch o' their shoes, if ever dey had latches, which ain't so in dese yer times, howsomever it might 'a' been before. But it 's a fact dey 've done shet 'emselves up like dere wa'n't nothin' in de whole worl' but folks askin' an' beggin'; an' to open de do' to quality again — if dat ain't jubilee, what is?"

Again Simmons checked a tendency to a double shuffle, as he hastened to answer the bell, beaming from ear to ear as Dr. Strothers appeared before him. He bowed profoundly as if to a master, and again at the young man's kindly —

"Well, Simmons, how goes it?"

"A heap better dan sinners has any right to look for," he said with effusion. "In de library 's de best place, Doctor."

Simmons's white wool had never looked so dignified and impressive a crown as now, when a sense of coming good had carried him quite out of himself; and Dr. Strothers put out his hand impulsively, to find the old servant holding it as if it were the Kohinoor.

"De Lord bring everything out all right," he said solemnly; "and for shuah He will."

Dr. Strothers went on into the library, and sat down. He had not asked for Mrs. Herndon; but she would come, and he sat there quietly. A fortnight ago he had vowed that he would never willingly place himself in her way again, but the look in her eyes in that instant of greeting had shown him that remission had come. All the day, as he went his busy way, it had stayed with him. He did not even ask why the barrier had first been raised, or why it had fallen. He did not question how his wooing would speed. With one more look all questions would be answered. There was not even haste. She would come.

Simmons waited in a fever of impatience, hesitating whether to go up, lest perchance Miss Erminia should pounce upon him, and wellnigh collapsing with relief as Margaret slowly descended the stairs. She was in black velvet, the long clinging folds giving a stateliness accented by the lingering movement. Violets were at neck and belt, but no other hint of

color, the beautiful head rising like another flower from the softly rounded neck.

"De Doctor's done come," Simmons began, and stopped; for Margaret had looked at him half unconsciously, and went down now through the long room, pausing as she put back the heavy portière and looked toward the fire, from which Dr. Strothers had just turned. A bright flame shot up suddenly, and the light fell full upon her face, its clear paleness flushed for a swift instant with the color that passed as swiftly. He moved toward her and she toward him, silently, his eyes fixed on her face, till, as they neared, his arms opened, and, still without a word, she went into them, and felt the strong, tender clasp, and knew she was at home. A murmur of thanksgiving came from him at last as he held her, and stooped and kissed her lips, — a long kiss, that held not only passion but the consecration of passion; something so inexpressibly tender and high that Margaret's tears fell in a sudden shower. This was love and life. The winter had ended. Spring was here, and this warm shower meant only fairer buds and blossoms.

She freed herself at last; for the rustle of silk was heard on the stairs, and Miss Erminia appeared, looking with sudden suspicion at the silent pair.

"It's very singular how terribly you two seem to disagree always lately," she said; and then uttered a little cry, for Miss Marcia, close behind, felt the real pulse of things, as Erminia had failed to do, and in an instant had put her gentle old arms about Margaret, one hand reaching out to the lover, who suddenly enveloped both in a comprehensive embrace.

"I have my rights, too," he said, "and shall take them."

"You are an exceedingly impertinent young man," began Miss Erminia, severely, relenting a little as he

bent to kiss her. "I don't see in the least what this all means, but I suppose — "

What she supposed remained unknown; for the bell had rung as they descended the stairs, and Margaret went hastily to her place, hoping that neither eyes nor face would betray her.

"By Jove!" Mr. Chichester Kirk said, under his breath, as she came forward. "She 's ten times handsomer than ever. — Evidently philanthropy has agreed with you," he pursued, aloud. "You are looking delightfully well, Mrs. Herndon."

The need for reply was ended by a sudden rush, Mrs. Hammersmith fluttering in ecstatically, followed by half a dozen familiar faces, all warmed to unwonted animation by the unusual conditions of the meeting. The room filled rapidly, and Simmons nodded approvingly as he heard the buzz of conversation, and continually opened the door to fresh arrivals. Mr. and Mrs. Featherstone had not appeared; and as the hands of the clock passed half-past eight, people looked expectantly toward the door.

"There is no doubt about his coming?" said Mr. Hammersmith, questioningly.

"Hardly the slightest," Mrs. Herndon said, with a little movement toward the musician of the evening, who went at once to the piano. "He has been reserving all his strength for the evening, and wishes to meet you all in precisely this way, — the last time, I suppose, for a year at least."

"Italy will set him up," Mr. Hammersmith said hastily, a little shiver making itself evident as Margaret said "the last time." "He has simply discounted his future a year or two by overwork, and rest is the only thing for him. It is an American habit; and till we learn to take climate into account as a knock-down element when trifled with, all workers will come to just such places. What the devil! —

I beg your pardon, Mrs. Herndon, but that 'Last Greeting' of Schubert's always drives me out of my senses. Why will people choose such music?"

"Monroe is over there. Perhaps he, as Vice-President, had better call the Club to order," Mr. Hurst said, approaching Mrs. Herndon. "There are the minutes to be read, and a new name or two to be proposed."

The bell rang as he spoke.

"There they are," Mrs. Hammersmith cried. "I was really getting very uneasy. Becket! Why, it's young Tom Becket. What is the matter?"

Becket, a lad of eighteen, the son of one of Mr. Featherstone's oldest friends, was very pale, and his eyes red with crying.

"I want Mrs. Herndon," he said, as she came toward him anxiously. "It's all over," he said, making an effort at composure. "I was there — mother and I — at dinner, and he was quite himself. I followed him up to the study, and half-way up the stairs he turned and took my arm. 'It is plain that I need a son,' he said, and leaned on me all the way. He sat down and pointed to the book he wanted, and I went toward it. Then I heard a sound, a sort of gasp, and sprang back; and he just smiled a moment, and was gone before a soul could get to him. Mother told me to run down to you, and Mrs. Featherstone wants you."

The guests had crowded about the drawing-room door, and fell back now silent and, for the moment, panic-stricken. If it had been the same house as a year ago, the instant thought must have been that a fatality attended it; and even now one or two looked doubtfully at Mrs. Herndon as they bade her good-night.

"There's something ill-omened about her," Mr. Hurst said, as he hurried away. "On the whole, I

think I won't go there again. So far it has hit others, but the stroke might happen to fall on me, you know. What the deuce does it all mean, anyhow?"

"It means that the Ultimates have gone to destruction," said Mr. Kirk, gloomily. "He had managed to hold them together; but you can't show me another man in New York, not even myself, — and I may say without vanity that I have phenomenal influence. They 're done for."

Mr. Hurst shrugged his shoulders, thankful that they were between, rather than under, lamps, and his expression thus not discernible, and soon took his own way, smiling at the conceit of men in general and this man in particular.

"A consummate ass," he said to himself; and he turned in at the Union League.

Dr. Strothers came toward Margaret as she turned from the last reluctantly departing member.

"You are going up?" he said. "My coupé was to come at half-past nine, and must be here in a moment or two. May I take you?"

"I shall be so glad," Margaret said, and hurried up to make the necessary change in her dress. "I shall stay with Mrs. Featherstone if she wishes it," she said as she came down; "so I shall leave you in charge, Cousin Marcia, and Simmons will take good care of you."

"'Deed he will," Simmons returned, with devotion; and he watched the pair going down the steps together with an expression of such supreme content that Miss Erminia turned upon him.

"You take too much upon yourself, Simmons. One would think you were the master of everything."

"I reckon I 'm master of myself, Miss Erminy; an' long 's I 'm dat, folks need n't be skeered over what Ole Simmons 'ill take on him."

Miss Erminia went to her room at once, a retort of any description meaning a day's retirement, and Miss Marcia followed her with a little sigh.

"Home is best for both of us," she said; "and I 'm glad that we can leave Margaret now, without any feeling that she needs us. I think there will be little delay, Erminia."

"It makes not the slightest difference to me whether there is or not," Miss Erminia said. "I am perfectly certain in either case that no consideration will be shown to me, and I shall go home as soon as possible."

"Fo' de Lawd!" said Simmons, who had stood at the foot of the stairs and started at the final bang of the door. "Fo' de Lawd! I do really believe Ole Miss had an eye on him herself." And in this conviction Simmons remained to the day of his death, undisturbed by the fact that within less than a year after Captain Drummond's widowhood began, Miss Erminia became the second Mrs. Drummond, and had full opportunity to study unchecked, thereafter, the bearings upon character of both knobs and knuckles.

Margaret was silent as the coupé rolled rapidly up town. This strong, warm hand that held hers with a soft firmness meant a rest so absolute that words seemed useless; but she roused herself presently.

"I have everything to tell you," she said, "but it must all wait. This sadness, that I had no thought could come so soon, bewilders me. I longed to have him live and find peace."

> "'My servant Death, with solving rite,
> Pours finite into infinite,'"

Dr. Strothers said, after a pause. "I think this was the only solution for him, and cannot be sorry that it has come quickly. For you and me there is time

enough. I want no haste. This one fact satisfies and fills."

The warm grasp tightened a little as he spoke; but he said no more till the house was reached, and they entered together. Mrs. Becket came hastily to meet them.

"You will forgive everything, I am sure," she said. "Poor Maria felt for the moment that she must have you, but she will not let even me come near her now, and is locked in her room. I think it is better so, but I will send for you on the first instant that she asks again. They are all up there now, and it is more merciful that she should not have to face all these terrible details."

Dr. Strothers had gone up for a moment or two; and Margaret stood silent, following in her mind the spirit free at last from its inheritance of doubt.

"Of course, he wants a post-mortem," Mrs. Becket went on; and Margaret felt in the words a sudden shock. "All doctors do; but it will not be. Strangely enough, that is one of the last positive wishes poor Cyrenius expressed. 'There is no real end to be served by it,' he said; 'and if I should die, I claim what is left of me as my right.' Very singular, was it not? as if he had some premonition of his going. It is an irreparable loss. And," she added to herself, as Dr. Strothers came down, and Margaret bade her good-night, with an offer of any service at any moment that might be required, "I never would have believed that as near a friend could show so little feeling."

Her impression was very evident; and Margaret half turned, as if to say a word that might alter it, then went on.

"I shall shock her more if I try to speak," she said. "Death seems to me such a deliverance for him that I cannot yet begin to feel sorrow; and yet

he leaves a great gap, that can hardly be filled. I know that when I come to a real sense of it I shall sorrow more than now, but I can hardly sorrow for anything to-night. I must tell you some things at once," she went on, after a little silence.

"I am coming in, if I may," Dr. Strothers said. "But you shall tell me nothing unless you feel it a necessity. Let it come as it will. There is all time before us."

"It must come now," Margaret said, "and then there will never again be need of any words. I want to bury it all to-night."

Simmons had closed the house, and started in surprise as he answered the bell.

"I'm mighty glad you ain't goin' to be shut up in dat house o' mournin', Miss Margaret," he said, as he hastened to lay fresh sticks on the smouldering fire in the library, and relight the gas, looking back with supreme satisfaction as Mrs. Herndon threw aside her wraps and took the low chair Dr. Strothers had wheeled before the fire.

"Wait a moment," she said. "I want a letter or two from my room."

She had clasped her hands nervously as she took her place again, and shook her head impatiently.

"It all crowds upon me in one incoherent mass," she said, "and I can hardly tell what must first be said. But this holds the story."

A slip of newspaper was in her hand; and as he took it and bent forward to read, he looked up bewildered.

"'El Señor William Joyce,'" he repeated. "You cannot mean —"

"William Joyce Herndon," she said. "Yes, that is he. Read it all."

Dr. Strothers glanced through the slip, then opened the letter from which it had been taken, and read

it hastily, dropping it as he ended, and turned toward Margaret with an expression of profoundest amazement.

"But, Margaret! this is incredible. Now I begin to understand what you have meant; but as for him — why, good Heavens! it takes my senses clean away."

"I wonder a little that mine have stayed," Margaret said. "This letter holds the same news in detail; but no one here must ever know that it is still barely two months since his real death. I knew almost a year ago — that is, I felt certain — that he had not died, and then had full details of just what he had done. It has come to seem to me perfectly natural; the simple working out of lawless elements held in check by a lifelong discipline of conventionality. In his own soul he had no law but self; and when what he fought to have, proved out of his reach, he turned to something more satisfying. I shall never blame him. I want to tell you from the beginning as thoroughly as I can, and then it is done, and need never have mention again."

She was silent a little, as if collecting thought; and Dr. Strothers moved back his chair more into shadow, and shielded his eyes with his hand.

"You see, it was quite my fault," she began. "There was never a girl quite so destitute of common sense. I idealized everything; and when we met, that he was so much older seemed only another element of strength, and power to teach. I longed so to learn. I had such hope for the future, — such certainty that I had work to do and that he would help me. He listened always, smiling a little; but his face was inscrutable. I thought it not the mask it proved to be, but the settled quiet of one who had lived and knew, and who had passed all the uncertainties and vague longings that moved me so strongly. And then he loved me, and I had never known

much love, and found a constant surprise in being first with any one. It made me very humble. I had always counted myself unlovable, through something in me of which I was unconscious and which yet made my atmosphere, — some strange power of repulsion; and the look he had for me seemed almost to draw my soul from me.

"We were married, and the first months were a dream of happiness. We travelled, and all that I most wanted to know he poured out to me. I know now how valueless some of his theories were; but art in all forms was his delight, and I lived in it with him. His desire was to remain abroad; and always, as months went on and I spoke of home and our future there, he was silent, or smiled a little, till one day when I had said that, beautiful as the time had been, I could never be fully content till we were in our own place and at work.

"'Drop that word hereafter,' he said, smiling at me. 'My ears are a little weary of it. Your work is with me.' 'I know it,' I said. 'I want work with you, but we must begin.' 'We have begun,' he said. 'There is no other work, if that is the word you must have. Let us understand one another. Your schemes have their place as schemes. They do you no harm. In fact, your enthusiasm makes them tolerable as conversation when better things fail, but you must realize that beyond words they mean nothing.'

"'Nothing?' I said. 'You are only teasing me, William. You know that to me they mean everything.' 'Your everything is in me,' he said, 'as mine is in you. Beyond that we need nothing.' 'But that is for self alone,' I said. 'You do not mean it. Our life is for others.'

"He looked at me; and for the first time his eyes were hard and he had no smile. 'It is essential that

you should understand,' he said. 'I have absolutely no intention of carrying out these projects. Life is sufficiently full, and I have other uses for money.' 'But there is a great deal of money,' I said at last, dumb for the moment, yet certain that he was only trying me,— testing my faith. 'You knew that long ago I had planned how my income should be used in part. I am not unreasonable, and I should submit to your judgment, but—' 'But me no buts,' he said lightly. You see, I remember every word. I could never forget, for at the last it burned in. 'Whatever you wish is yours, Margaret, save this Utopian set of schemes which you will soon come to see mean nothing and are nothing but dreams. I may have to return, for there are some business complications that will probably call me back; but you will find that society will give you all the occupation you need, and that your rightful place is there.'

"I am strangely made. I have often no words at the moment, and seem persuaded of a thing against which I am inwardly protesting. I was silent then, and he thought me convinced, and went away, patting my head as if I were some pet animal rebellious for the moment. He was astonished and indignant when I returned to it the next day; argued, at first gently and condescendingly, and then with more and more heat, till at last he said words that showed me his real self. I remember them all, but I shall never repeat them. He did not know what he was doing as he poured them out, and I saw that what I had thought my influence was simply my youth and such beauty as I owned, and my blind faith in him. To find that faith had slipped away outraged him so incredibly that no words were enough to give his feeling. He forgot himself and all self-restraint in furious demonstration of my obstinacy and blind stupidity. It was not all at once. Day after day he

returned to the charge. He meant to conquer again; to compel an allegiance in the beginning given freely, and worthless unless given freely. I came to have not only terror of what might come next, but a contempt that was at moments almost loathing; and yet he still had power to move me, because he loved me with such force as his nature had, and I said to myself that because he loved me and needed me he must be first in my life. So we came home, and settled down in the house you know. It was months after that first day of revelation. I had adjusted myself to the new conditions. I had no near friends. The few who knew me well thought of my marriage as wellnigh ideal, and not one but Sally Longshore ever said a word that indicated other impression. Even to her I never spoke. My own aim was to hold still; to accept quietly the consequences of my own blunder, and do with my life what I could. But the wall grew always thicker between us. At first he played upon me, — touched every nerve of my soul, till I longed for death as the only release. Then, as more and more I retreated into myself, yet lost myself in claims of the life he loved, the wall grew a wall of glass, so clear that he hardly knew it there, and, seeing me still, thought that he could still touch me.

"The money side of things I could never understand, and, like other foolish women before me, I asked no questions. I had been told that my personal income would be very large; but he showed to me how values had shrunk and heavy losses came here and there, till I grew to feel that it was only his wonderful business knowledge that gave me even the allowance which he told me I must not exceed. In the mean time he built the house I left for this, and he spent enormous sums on his collection. The first five years of our life at home were years in

which he bent his will to one end, — suppression of every thought and feeling in me that had been my deepest life. We studied and read together; for I did what he wished, and often I forgot myself for the time and almost satisfied him, and then he would rail at me for holding back and forbidding expression of what he vowed I really felt. At last he began to see. He had thought that submission meant acceptance, and that in the end I might fill in the warp he had set for me. He was patient, and meant to wait, and he had even a certain sense of justice which showed itself at the last; but his only conception of marriage was absorption, — the absolute renunciation of my personality in favor of his; never even a dream that I, too, had my place, and, even if we walked hand in hand, must still use my own feet and not his. He used to sit and watch me by the hour, till every nerve quivered and all the force that was in me could barely hold me quiet, and sometimes he would say: 'Foolish child! Can't you see that you have no escape except to me?' I had ceased to answer or argue long ago. I seemed to myself turning slowly to stone, till I did not even wonder if an end could come. Faith slipped away; I had nothing left. And all the time the outward life went on, — that incessant round of the social observances he loved; and I played my part till it played itself, and I watched it as if I, the real person, stood outside and judged it all as if it were another.

"At last he grew tired. He wanted response, and it began to dawn upon him that that possibility was past. Then there came in his way a woman, whose power had been felt by more than one man, but who suddenly concentrated upon him. She had no discretion, but he had. He cared, to a degree I have never seen equalled, for his name, for the place his family had held. He was the last one of his

name, and, so far as his own theory went, he had kept it untarnished. Not even passion could make him forget what he owed to it; and when the passion so took possession that to yield was inevitable, he accepted renunciation as the price to be paid, and deliberately planned in such manner that no possible shadow could ever fall upon the name. He told me nothing then. This knowledge came a few months later. But I saw his absorption, and knew that he had elected some strange path, in which I thought he would force me to go. He talked to me much of his affairs; in some ways gave me knowledge of investments and so on that might — he was always careful to say *might* — in time give me some of the wealth I had supposed was mine. At the last he was very gentle, and on that day that he was lost, he came to me in the early morning. 'It is good-by, Margaret,' he said. 'You're going to find that I'm a better fellow than you thought, but you won't believe it to-day as you will to-morrow, perhaps.' He stood looking at me a moment, and there were tears in his eyes. I could not understand, and only pitied him and myself a little more than usual.

"You know what came then. That next evening but one brought the news that his boat had been picked up in the lower bay. I did not know till two months later that this woman he loved had sailed for Rio the day he left me. He went in a sailing-vessel which took him up from the bay; and every plan was so perfectly laid that not one trace of his identity was discovered then or afterward; nor would it have been, had she not proved unfaithful. But from the beginning I was certain that he was not dead. I had no faintest clew to his plans. His will left me absolute mistress of my own, and told me, too, how thoroughly he had deceived me from the very beginning. I asked few questions. It was

all plain without them, and I began to live my own life in ways that you know.

"It was not long after I had found Meg that I met one day an old acquaintance, just back from South America, who told me incidentally of a wonderful resemblance between a man whom he had met once or twice in the outskirts of Rio and my husband, whom he had seen perhaps two or three times. I asked no questions, but knew on the instant what it meant. He was there; and, knowing his mental make-up, I knew he would never return. But that did not free me; and you see now how it was that from that time I was obliged to think of all chances that might come to me, and how in the end to put aside what showed itself, was the one thing that had to be done. You could not understand, and how should you? The year had given me so much. I was so happy, so grateful. The years made themselves plain. I saw what I could do, and each day held more and more meaning. Doubt died. I felt in myself power that had seemed dead, and threw myself into the work that was at my hand, in ways that you know. But I knew that my life must be in them, never again in any mere personal happiness; and I was coming, through all the sharpness of conflict, to know that there was something better than happiness. I thought I had accepted the whole and was ready to bear the whole, till the day that letter came, and the miserable soul dying there, forsaken and alone, poured out its story, as the last act of justice it could do. He had thrown away his life, and had but one comfort, and that, the knowing that he would not be betrayed, and that to his world he was already dead. But one person had ever really suspected that he was not, — Savage Logan, who was always an evil influence in his life, and who has tried many times to extract an expression of opinion from

me. He will never know. The letter and newspaper slip are from the Catholic priest to whom poor William turned, and who gave him absolution at the last; and there it all ends. We shall never need to speak of him again, unless there is more that you will wish to ask."

"Nothing," Dr. Strothers said emphatically. "Save as it has done its work with you, I want no further knowledge. I must go, Margaret. There is still some one to see; but I shall come early to-morrow evening, and then you must know my story. My lines have not all been easy; but we have both been in the same path, and it remains ours."

He had come to her side again as she rose; and once more he took her into his arms, and she felt the beating of the strong heart and the sense of quiet, certain blessedness to come.

"I think we are ready for the new life," he said, — "the life that could never have been possible without the pain and struggle of the old. Light is here, and peace, and certainty of always better and better days. The old life is dead, and the new life has begun. Good-night, Margaret."

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